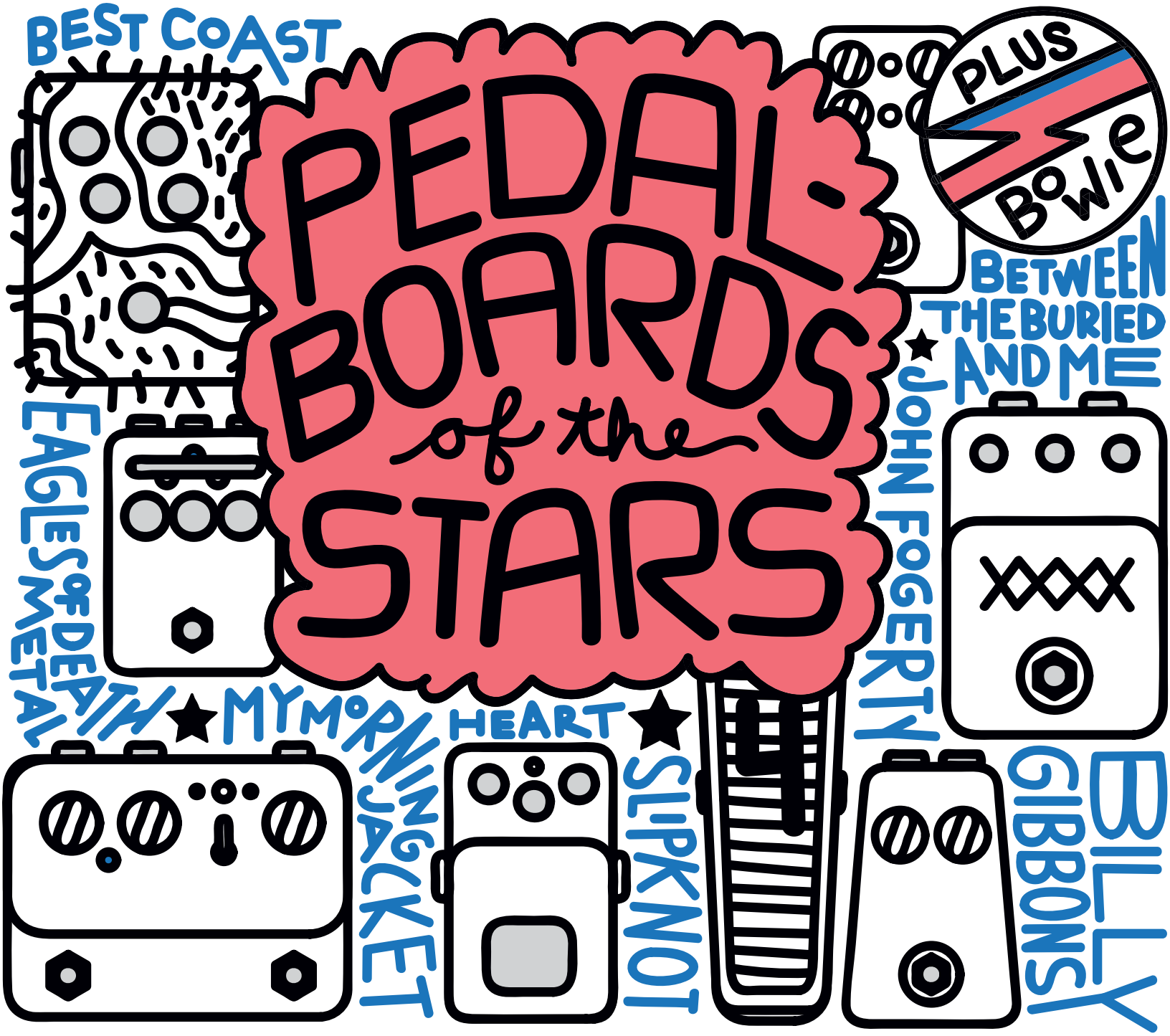
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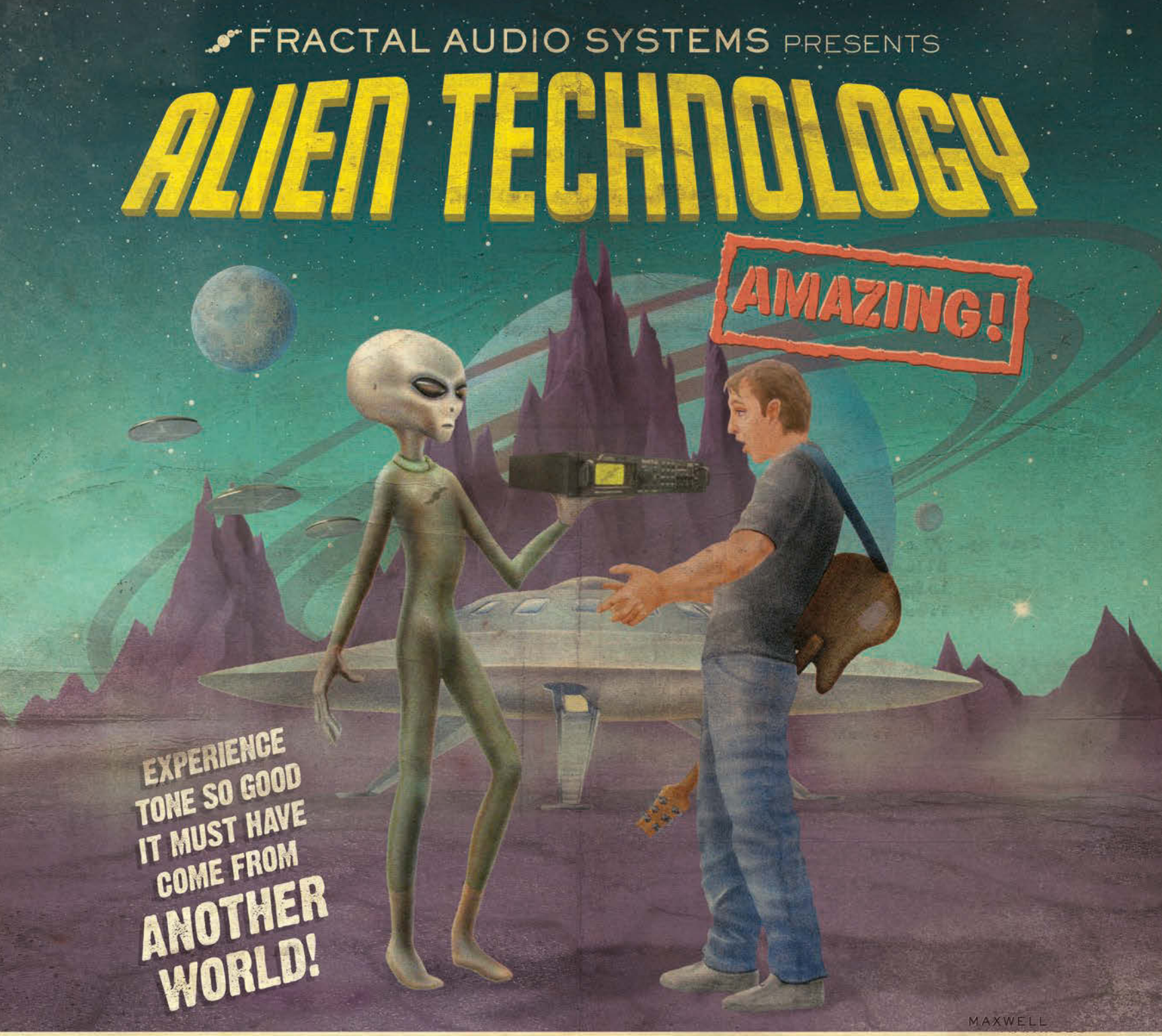
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The Periodic Pedal-Purge Imperative

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

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It's been more than four years since I took to Tuning Up to share my first pedalboard-purge experiment ["To Stomp, or Not to Stomp," October 2011]. I talked about how, inspired by both a band-practice epiphany and the *au naturel* prowess of some of my guitar heroes, I discovered newfound zeal for the guitar after clearing off most of my pedals and paring my stomp station down to just tremolo and reverb pedals. The exercise in simplicity helped me concentrate on listening to intricate details of timing, texture, and attack, as well as try new techniques and improve execution of go-to ones.

A year later I felt like my playing was much better—more nuanced and dynamic. But I also found myself with a serious case of pedal lust. I was convinced my improved playing could go even further if a new color or two were added to my pedal palette.

Since then I've totally relapsed. My board has seen about a dozen different pedals, with nine or so becoming permanent residents. A delay. A different fuzz. Another tremolo. A compressor. Another reverb. A bit-crusher. An overdrive and a boost. A Uni-Vibe clone. I even added a new chapter to my tumultuous, on-again/off-again relationship with the wah. But now it's gotten to the point where I face the same problem that led to my 2010 epiphany: I'm often so focused on activating cool pedal combinations that it detracts from my playing—and that's got me seriously considering investing in a loop-switcher.

But something unexpected happened recently when I took a new distortion pedal home to put it through the *PG* review wringer. Because I'd tidied up my messy pedalboard just a couple of weeks before that, I didn't want to re-route anything in order to integrate it into my regular signal chain. So I plugged straight into the dirt box, then into my amp. I'm sure you get where I'm going with this….

Even with the pedal dialed to produce just a nice, clean boost, I found myself marveling at the raw, gritty glory of a great tube amp on the verge of nastiness. The unadulterated, primal immediacy of hot EL34s was as riveting and fraught with dynamic possibility as the craziest, boutique-y-ist pedals on my board—even sans reverb. (And that's saying something, considering what a notorious ambience addict I am.)

Now, I'm not saying this happy accident is going to send me on another pedalboard purge. It might. It might not. Maybe it'll just help me resist the urge to stomp on something simply because it *seems* like a unique way to create a contrasting mood. Maybe I'll simplify a little bit and change my mind about the loop-switcher. Or maybe I'll end up with one but I'll remember to consider the un-effected option more often.

The big takeaway for me is that this type of stripped-down sonic self-inventory is an absolute imperative—something every pedal lover should periodically indulge in. The Greek aphorism "know thyself" comes to mind. More orthodox players than I might preach that the better a player you are, the less gear you need. Or that you can't really know yourself as a guitarist if you're always slathering stomp sauce all over your riffs or progressions. I wouldn't go that far, but I don't think it's such a stretch to say that occasionally bypassing all the doodads is a healthy way to assess your music—to reevaluate who you are and where you want to go.

It's not a question of pedals being good or bad, or whether there's a certain threshold at which you're just a junky who needs a fix in order to get a momentary musical high. No one can tell you when you've reached that point. But at the very least, quitting cold turkey every now and then might help you see how to get more out of the stompboxes you decide to plunk down on your board at any given moment.



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Backing the Rick

Good for you ["Reader Guitar of the Month: 1960 Rickenbacker 330F," February 2016]! It's a guitar and meant to be played! There are way too many guitars that are in great playing shape that are stuck in a glass case or in a vault someplace. Play it!

—Donald Butler,
via premierguitar.com

All Hands on Deck

Nobody ever asks classical players ["Tone Tips: Hands vs. Gear," February 2016]. We spend years learning different touches, techniques, and tones, all on the most stripped-down of gear: six strings on a box, with either fingernails or flesh. Try this: Get out your most basic rig. Spend some time with it attempting to get as many different sounds as you can. If you give it a real try, you'll come up for air an hour or two later going, "*Daaaayumn.*"

—Jay Albert,
via Facebook

I had an experience where our band was prepping for a big show, and we had a guest sitting in on pedal steel. Our lead guitarist played a Strat through a Deluxe Reverb, and his tone was stinging (no, he didn't live on the bridge pickup). After we were done with rehearsal, the pedal steel guy picked up the Strat, didn't change a thing, and all of a sudden the most wonderful silky soulful tones started coming out of the amp. Hands.

—Doug Budzak,
via Facebook

Tone is in the head, heart, and hands. The tools an artist uses will certainly have their own influence on tone and inspiration. Nice article, Pete Thorn. And thanks for the heads up on Blake Mills.

—Doug Guillaume,
via Facebook

I discovered an interesting practice technique the other day I would like to share. I was plugged into my PC running a popular amp simulation software that has a built in 8-track recorder. Instead of putting on my headphones, I set them off to the side, just close enough to hear the prerecorded backing track I was jamming to. I turned down my overdriven guitar in the mix so I could hardly hear it through the headphones and jammed along only being able to hear the backup track and my Telecaster "unplugged." When I listened back to the mix the guitar track (now with effects) sounded amazing. I compared it to a mix I recorded previously with the headphones on when I was hearing the overdrive signal on my guitar and the difference was clear. My licks on the take with the headphones off were much cleaner and seemed more inventive. The tone seemed to cut through the mix better as well. I'm definitely going to explore this practice technique and encourage those reading this to try the same if you have a similar setup. It is a good way to check the tone you get through your hands versus the tone you get from the amp/overdrive.

—Kaz, via premierguitar.com

Dessert First

Okay. Fine. I'll admit it. Just like eating the frosting from the middle of an Oreo first, as soon as I get my *Premier Guitar* magazine from the mailbox I skip to the back and read John Bohlinger's "Last Call." Always relevant, interesting, witty, and with a good amount of sarcasm. He should write a book. Really. Thanks for creating the world's best guitar mag.

—Dave Cooley,
via premierguitar.com

The AutistiX

Of all the articles I've read over the years in guitar mags, I think your interview with AutistiX and their families was one of the very best ["Butterflies & Demons," February 2016]. It was informational and inspirational, written in the spirit and humor of the band themselves. It's just another reason I consider *PG* the finest guitar magazine of all. I know you all will continue your fine work for many years to come, but for now, please accept my congratulations and thanks.

—Larry Power,
Swampscott, Massachussetts

Keep those comments coming!

Please send your suggestions, gripes, comments, and good words directly to **info@premierguitar.com**.

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@premierguitar @mojosarmy I have but one compression that I use a lot #FromThe80s

—@rwyjunior

@premierguitar @DavidBowieReal back when I was in college we'd always leave our name as Ziggy Stardust when ordering subs.

—@Billcam8

I'll hand it to you. You are one of the few sites that doesn't try to be the TMZ of the guitar world and I appreciate it.

—Juda Farmer

I met a roadie for Megadeth in line at Kennywood once.

—JR Bird

Why are there so many tube hoarders charging outrageous prices for these little pieces of glass and filament?

—Howard Chaunce Schwartz



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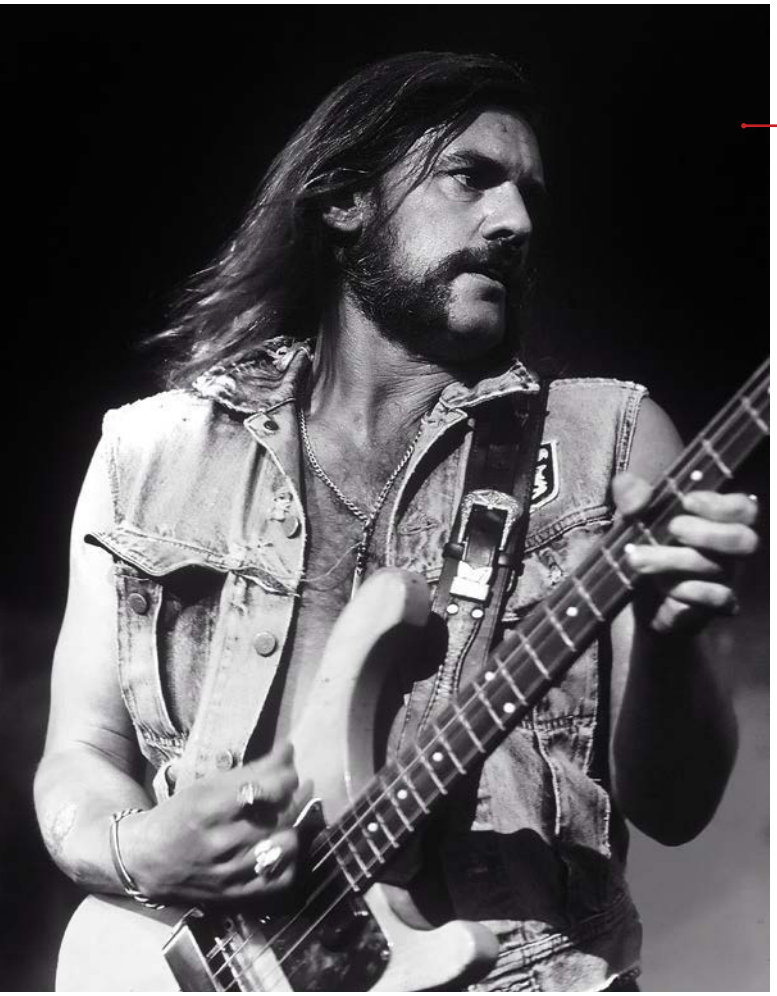
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"Motörhead is over, of course. Lemmy was Motörhead, but the band will live on in the memories of many."
—Mikkey Dee, Obituary: Lemmy Kilmister, p. 26

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Top: Photo by Ken Settle **Bottom:** Photo by Tim Mullally

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FEATURED





Holy Grail of Gretsch

In January, Nashville's **Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum** unveiled the largest exhibition of stringed instruments ever mounted within its walls. ***American Sound and Beauty: Guitars from the Bachman-Gretsch Collection*** comprises 75 instruments, including a one-of-a-kind 1971 White Falcon bass, and the 1955 White Penguin 6134 and late-'30s Artist Orchestra No. 150 shown here. The guitars in this exhibit were collected by Canadian guitarist and songwriter **Randy Bachman**, a founding member of the Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, who acquired more than 300 historic and rare Gretsch guitars in the 1970s and '80s. His collection was purchased in 2008 by the Gretsch Foundation. Can't visit in person? No worries: We photographed highlights from this exhibition (which runs through July 10), and you can view this gorgeous gear gallery right now on our website.

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NEW INTERVIEWS!

Ode to the Sun: Circles Around the Sun and Sun Club

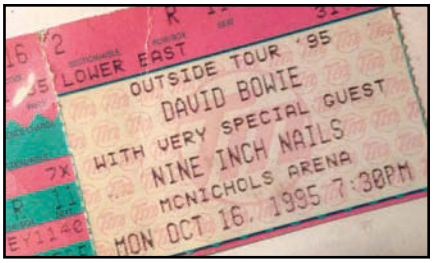


If you attended any of the **Grateful Dead's "Fare Thee Well"** shows last June, you might've heard the sprawling jams playing over the PA before the band took the stage and through intermission. The music was created by guitarist Neal Casal—a current member of both the Chris Robinson Brotherhood and Hard Working Americans, a former member of Ryan Adams & the Cardinals, and a prolific singer-songwriter in his own right. The music has been released as a double-disc album, *Interludes for the Dead*, and the band Casal worked with on the project is going by the name **Circles Around the Sun**. Casal spoke with *PG* about his influences, making *Interludes*, and sharing the stage with Phil Lesh and Bob Weir.

In other artist news, we caught up with **Mikey Powers** and **Shane McCord** of Baltimore band **Sun Club** on the occasion of releasing their debut full-length, *The Dongo Durango*. The pair discussed budget gear, their songwriting rituals, and how they've made music with each other since adolescence. Read these interviews and more at **premierguitar.com/mar2016**.

Top left: Photos by Andy Ellis

GUITARDOM'S TOP TWEETS



Still feeling sad...
—@cyberpr

Oh my. Lemmy got let in on the big secret. One of the greatest rockers of all time. Amazingly unique incredible bass player. My hero. Wow.
—@flea333

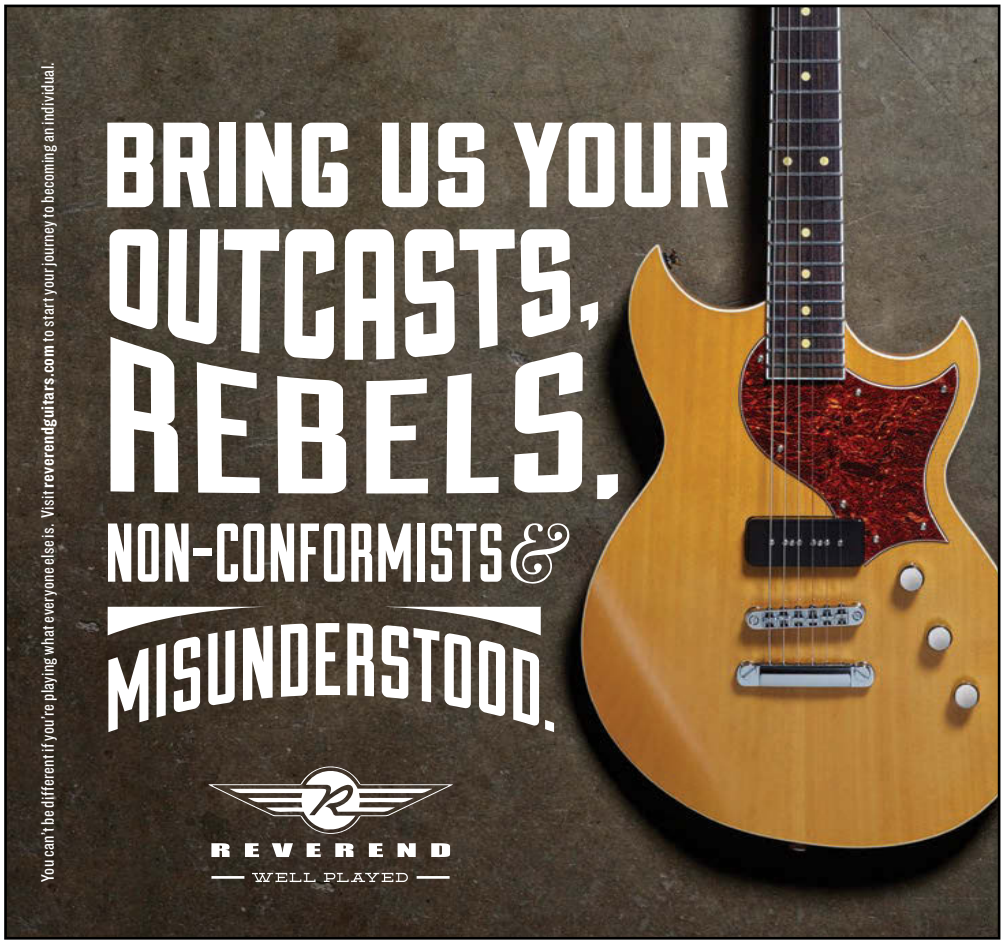
My review of anything @dwarfcraft ever makes from now until the end of time: buy it it rumbles my bones.
—@willtoise



What are we supposed to make of @PedalGenie and her handling of two male cable ends like so?
—@jesshopp

When will hipsters go full circle and start listening to jazz again?
—@cameronmizell





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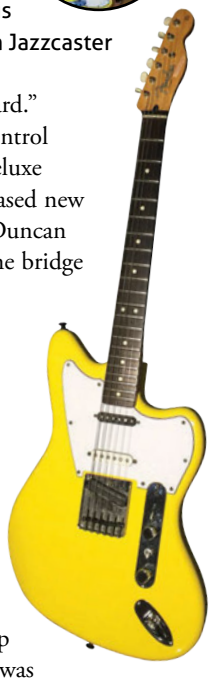




READER GUITAR OF THE MONTH



Name: John Huston
Hometown: Chicago, Illinois
Guitar Model: Frankenstein Jazzcaster



I call this the "Fender Coward."

The neck, bridge, and control knobs are from a Fender Deluxe Nashville Telecaster I purchased new in 2004. Once a Seymour Duncan Hot Rails was installed in the bridge position it became my best-sounding guitar. However, unlike my other guitars, I struggled with frequent broken strings, particularly the A string. At one point, I had my guitar tech install graphite bridge saddles, hoping they would help alleviate the breakage. Alas, nothing seemed to work.

I chalked the breakage up to the attack my right hand was making with the strings—most of my other guitars have arm and rib contours, while the Tele does not. I went back to my guitar guy and asked about sanding down the body, Jeff Beck-style. At the cost he estimated, I could instead afford to buy a custom Warmoth body. So that's what I did. I chose the "Jazzcaster" body (Jazzmaster shape/weight, but cut for Tele neck pocket and guts) and chose yellow, my favorite color.

I later had the guys at Chicago Fret Works install a Rio Grande Bastard P-90-style pickup in the neck position, along with a "super switch" between the volume and tone knobs. This allows me to activate the neck pickup at any time, giving me the all-important ability to choose the bridge-and-neck combination that I couldn't otherwise with a 5-way selector and three pickups. I also installed new white 15:1 gear ratio tuners.

It's taken a bit of a beating these last couple years with my band, Stomatopod, but I love this guitar. It's the perfect combination of Telecaster (bridge and string height from the body), Jazzmaster (shape and balance), and Stratocaster (the middle pickup gives me oodles of sonic diversity).

Send your guitar story to submissions@premierguitar.com.

Photo by Meredith M. Goldberg



OPENING NOTES

JB Brubaker

December 14, 2015
Rocketown
Nashville, TN
Photo by Chris Kies

August Burns Red's lead guitarist gets fast and furious with his longtime No. 1, a 2009 Ibanez RGA121 Prestige with a custom paint job and an EMG 81/85 set that Brubaker swapped in for the stock pickups. "This guitar plays like no other guitar I've ever had," says Brubaker. "It's tight but full, with good sustain, and doesn't feed back when I don't want it to."



OPENING NOTES

John Dwyer

December 18, 2015
The Teragram Ballroom
Los Angeles, CA
Photo by Debi Del Grande

Thee Oh Sees frontman John Dwyer finds the sweet spot on his primary axe, a 2010 Electrical Guitar Company custom build. Based on the specs Dwyer provided, the acrylic-bodied axe features a Travis Bean-inspired metal neck and a pair of EGC high-output single-coils. "He is really rough on his guitars," says luthier Kevin Burkett. "And these were designed and built to have the hell kicked out of them on a regular basis."



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| 1945-2015 |

MOTÖRHEAD'S LEMMY KILMISTER

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

Lemmy's original name for Motörhead was Bastard, but his manager informed him that a band called Bastard would never be allowed on British TV's *Top of the Pops*.

Lemmy Kilmister sang with his head tilted back, like a wolf howling at the moon. His voice was charged with the same animal ferocity—a Jack Daniel's-cured growl that was a constant reminder of the danger within the bloodline of rock 'n' roll. And his bass playing with Motörhead was no less intense, drenched in distortion from a wall of overdriven Marshalls and punched out by a pick pummeling the strings of the three-humbucker signature model 4004 LK Rickenbackers he played.

All of that was silenced on December 28 when Lemmy died in his L.A. home at age 70 from an aggressive form of cancer he'd been diagnosed with just a few days before. The legendary bassist was stricken by heart issues and diabetes in recent years, and the health problems weren't just bad enough to cancel a European tour in 2013 and a handful of stops on a U.S. tour this fall—they actually induced Lemmy to quit smoking and reduce his drinking. He switched from his beloved Jack Daniel's—he reportedly consumed a bottle a day for more than 30 years—to vodka, which he considered a less potent beverage.

Rock 'n' roll was Lemmy's religion and he was one of its most colorful disciples, dressing in leather and denim biker regalia on and off the stage. The band he formed and fronted since 1975 took its name from the British slang term for a speed freak, and that perfectly matched the intensity of the music they played from day one. Although Motörhead is often cited for an obvious influence on thrash metal, the group was also part of the nascent punk movement, with the sped-up, hardened pub-rock sound of their debut album, 1977's *Motörhead*, playing comfortably next to early efforts by the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, and the Dead Boys.

As Motörhead's sound crystallized, Lemmy's trio pushed tempos and the buzz-saw mesh of bass and guitar even harder and louder, paving the way for the New Wave of British Heavy Metal. In turn, that movement influenced bands like Metallica and Anthrax, who understood Motörhead's foundational role in the scene, revered them for it, and—along with Slayer and Megadeth—often covered Motörhead songs. The respect was mutual. In 2005, Motörhead won a Grammy Award for its cover of Metallica's "Whiplash," which appeared on *Metallic Attack: The Ultimate Tribute*.

Lemmy, whose given first name was Ian, was born on Christmas Eve 1945 in Burslem, a farming hamlet that joined with five other small communities to form the town Stoke-on-Trent in central England. His parents split when he was 3, and he moved to Wales with his mother when she remarried. While attending Sir Thomas Jones' School in Amlwch, he supposedly earned his nickname by hitting up friends for money (as in, "lemme a fiver") to cater to his blooming lifelong passion for playing slot machines.

But for "Lemmy," the true die was cast when he saw the Beatles at Liverpool's Cavern Club at the age of 16. He got a 6-string and began learning licks from the Fab Four's 1963 album *Please Please Me*, also picking up a thing or two about sarcasm from John Lennon along the way. Before long he was playing in a series of bands in northern England, though none caught fire. He eventually moved to London and roomed with Noel Redding, which then led to a gig as a roadie for the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Things began to click when he became bassist and singer for psychedelic rock band Hawkwind—an amphetamine-fueled adventure during which he developed his distinctive approach to bass: applying the double stops, full chords, and other basic blocks he'd learned during his previous career as a rhythm guitarist to his new 4-string instrument. After a 1975 arrest for drug possession at the Canadian border, Lemmy was fired from Hawkwind despite providing the vocals for the band's highest-charting single, 1972's U.K. No. 3 space-rock hit "Silver Machine."

Lemmy immediately formed his own band. In the ensuing decades,



Photo by Ken Settle

Motörhead cut a total of 22 studio albums, and Lemmy juggled a number of side projects—most notably the rockabilly group the Head Cat, which included Stray Cats drummer Slim Jim Phantom. He's the subject of the 2010 documentary film *Lemmy*, which includes many of his famous acolytes—Dave Grohl, Ozzy Osbourne, Joan Jett, and Anthrax's Scott Ian among them. Lemmy was also a gamer. "Ace of Spades" appears on three installments of the *Guitar Hero* series, and Lemmy himself is a character in *Guitar Hero: Metallica*.

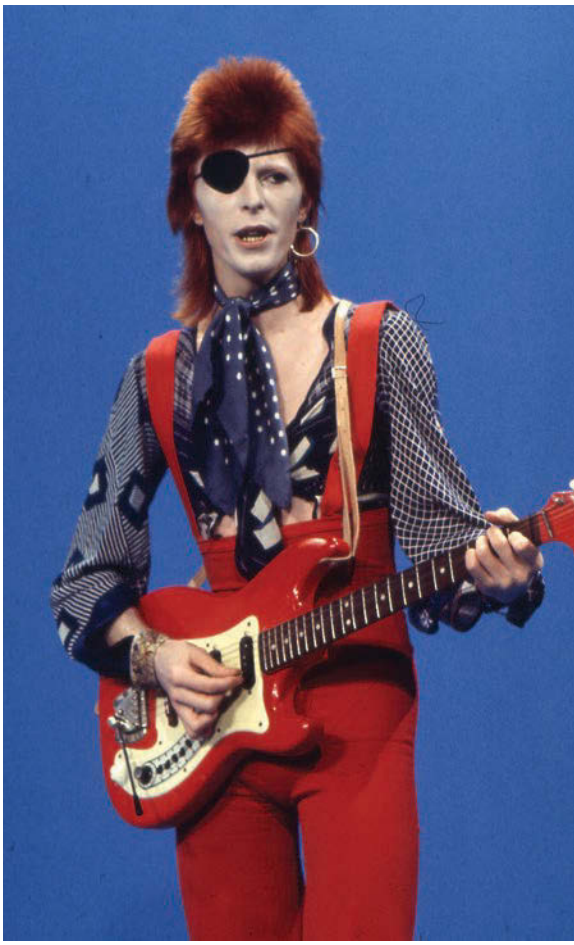
After Lemmy's death, Motörhead's most recent drummer, Mikkey Dee, was quoted by the Swedish newspaper *Expressen*, saying, "Motörhead is over, of course. Lemmy was Motörhead, but the band will live on in the memories of many."


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DAVID BOWIE

BY TED DROZDOWSKI



Bowie performs "Rebel Rebel" as the beloved alter ego Ziggy Stardust on a TV show in the Netherlands in 1974, while donning a Kent Hagström III with matching pantsuit and suspenders.

Photo by Laurens Van Houten / Frank White Photo Agency

The world lost one of its foremost champions of unique guitar work on January 10. David Bowie died at age 69, two days after releasing *Blackstar*, an album that seemed like the beginning of yet another of his famed creative rebirths. Unbeknownst to most, Bowie had reportedly been in the grip of cancer for 18 months and, in retrospect, the music and videos for *Blackstar*—with their introspective, spiritual, and death-reflective themes—now seem as if the artist knowingly created them as his own requiem. Beyond their stark, profound, epic beauty on a purely musical level, they're not only evidence that Bowie was a restless, boundary-pushing creator even as he looked death in the eye, but they're also a reminder of his invaluable contributions to 6-string greatness.

Bowie emerged from the English folk-rock scene of the 1960s to become one of the most inventive and eclectic artists of the classic rock era—and beyond. His innovative recordings with producer Brian Eno helped expose the 6-string genius of guitarists Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew to wider audiences on albums such as *Low* (1977), *Heroes* (1977), and *Lodger* (1979), which became the foundation for ambient sounds and studio effects in rock, laying the groundwork for such diverse bands as U2, Radiohead, and Sigur Rós. But even before that he'd helped establish the glam scene and set a bar for rock theatrics with his elaborate, transformative costuming and stage delivery, starting with his third studio album, 1970's *The Man Who Sold the World*.

That influential album also ignited his career-long habit of championing and collaborating with exceptional guitar players—a roster that starts with Mick Ronson and continues through Earl Slick (who debuted with Bowie on 1974's *Diamond Dogs*), Carlos Alomar (1975's *Young Americans*), Stevie Ray Vaughan (1983's *Let's Dance*), Reeves Gabrels (1989's *Tin Machine*), and now *Blackstar* guitarist Ben Monder. The list also includes guitarists who were already well established when they first began working with Bowie: King Crimson's Fripp, Peter Frampton (who performed on 1987's *Never Let Me Down*), Nile Rodgers (who produced and played on 1993's *Black Tie White Noise*), and David Torn, who played on the three albums before *Blackstar*, starting with 2002's *Heathen*.

Each guitarist was seemingly chosen according to the musical approaches Bowie was interested in exploring at the time. Ronson, with his big Les Paul/Marshall tone and rocking persona, fulfilled Bowie's interest in becoming writ large on record and onstage. Fripp, Belew, Gabrels, and Torn all seemed selected to help him explore new sonic and conceptual dimensions. Rodgers, Slick, Alomar, and Vaughan were drafted as fellow travelers down various American musical roads. Frampton and Bowie were schoolmates and near-lifelong friends.

But the initial explosion in the career of Bowie, who was born David Jones in London's Brixton district, coincided with the release of *The Man Who Sold the World* and the unveiling of his costumed, cosmetic'd, sexually ambiguous persona of Ziggy Stardust. Ziggy became the first of Bowie's many stage identities, which went on to include the dapper "Thin White Duke" of his *Young Americans* (1975) and *Station to Station* (1976) era, the expressionist Pierrot of *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* (1980), the punk-Gothic futurist of *Outside* (1995) and *Earthling* (1997), and, finally, the dapper, designer-suited rock 'n' roll *éminence grise* of the past 15 years.

Along the way Bowie acted in films, most notably *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), *The Hunger* (1983), and *Labyrinth* (1986). He also appeared on Broadway in the title role of *The Elephant Man*, and co-wrote the script and supplied the songs for the new *Lazarus*, which is currently enjoying an off-Broadway run at the New York Theater Workshop. Thanks to his flair for the visual and his interest in all art forms, Bowie cultivated a reputation in the fashion and arts worlds as well. He is the subject of a touring multi-media art exhibition called *David Bowie Is*, which debuted in 2013 and has made museum stops at major cities around the world including New York and Chicago.

Bowie remarked on his creative flexibility when I spoke with him in 1999 about his collaborations with Gabrels, who co-produced *Earthling* and co-wrote more than 70 songs with Bowie. "I think it's a matter of having a natural eclecticism," he said. "Reeves can be happy and prolific playing anything from jug-band music to working in a very avant-garde form. I work in a similar way. I do not feel any genre loyalty. I work in a combination of musical styles—a kind of hybrid. That has really been the essence of all the work I've done. It's my natural element."

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Ed Roland, Dean Roland, and Jesse Triplett

COLLECTIVE SOUL

Watch the video!

FACTOID
Ed Roland studied music composition at Berklee College of Music.

Ed Roland and guitar tech John Oliva met with Premier Guitar*'s John Bohlinger before a Collective Soul gig at Nashville's Marathon Music Works. Roland has retired his electric rig in favor of filling the acoustic space in the band, while his brother, Dean, and guitarist Jesse Triplett do the heavy electric lifting.*



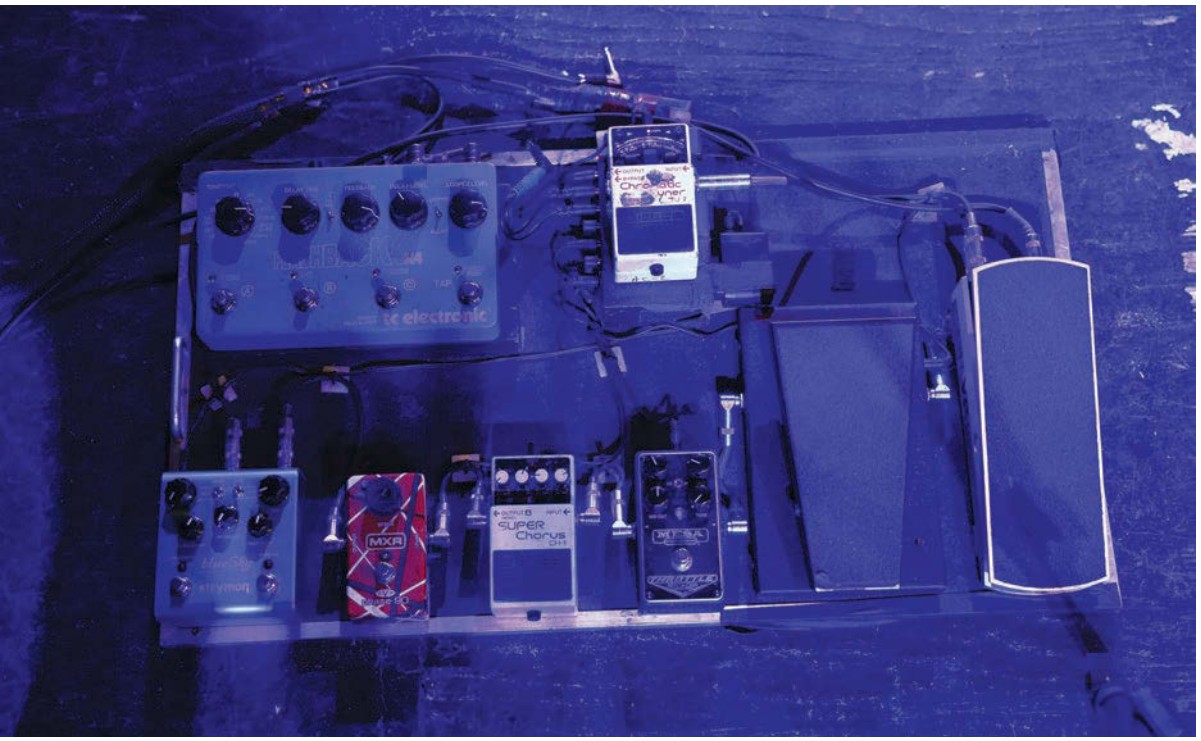


GUITARS

Top: Ed Roland rolls with just two acoustics on tour. He spends most of his time playing this Breedlove Legacy 12-string, which has a figured spruce top and maple back and sides.

Bottom: Dean Roland is a minimalist, gigging with one guitar and one amp. The guitar is an abused and loved 1994 Gibson Centennial Anniversary Les Paul Standard in Wine Red upgraded with a TonePros bridge and saddle. The LP is strung with Ernie Ball Beefy Slinky strings (.011-.054).







AMPS

Dean's amp is a 50-watt Mahalo Katy66. It's loaded with a pair of KT66 power tubes and a trio of 12AX7 preamp tubes in a proprietary gain stack. The amp feeds a pair of matched Mahalo 4x12 cabs.

EFFECTS

The first thing on Dean's board is an Ernie Ball volume pedal. From there the signal goes to a Morley Steve Vai Bad Horsie wah, Mesa/Boogie Throttle Box, Boss CH-1 Super Chorus, MXR EVH Phase 90, Strymon BlueSky, and a TC Electronic Flashback X4. A Boss TU-2 tuner is fed from the volume pedal, and a Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 (beneath the TU-2) keeps everything up and running.

Jesse Triplett has a rather expansive pedalboard that covers a ton of sounds. First up is an Ernie Ball volume pedal (which feeds a Boss TU-3 tuner) and a Dunlop Cry Baby wah. From there, it goes to a Keeley 4-knob compressor, Xotic AC Plus, Fulltone OCD, Electro-Harmonix Micro POG, and a trio of Strymon pedals (TimeLine, Mobius, and BigSky). A Tech 21 Fly Rig is wired up as a backup, and a Custom Audio Electronics MC-403 Power System supplies the juice. Finally, an EBow dangles on a string from his mic stand.

Matthew Murphy

THE WOMBATS

Watch the video!

FACTOID

Murph's pedalboard was customized to fit between the legs of his keyboard stand.

Wildly creative guitarist Matthew "Murph" Murphy admits he's not much of a gearhead, but techs Jamie Hicks and Simon Fuller fill in the nerdy details on the rig that drives the Wombats' Brit-flavored garage rock.

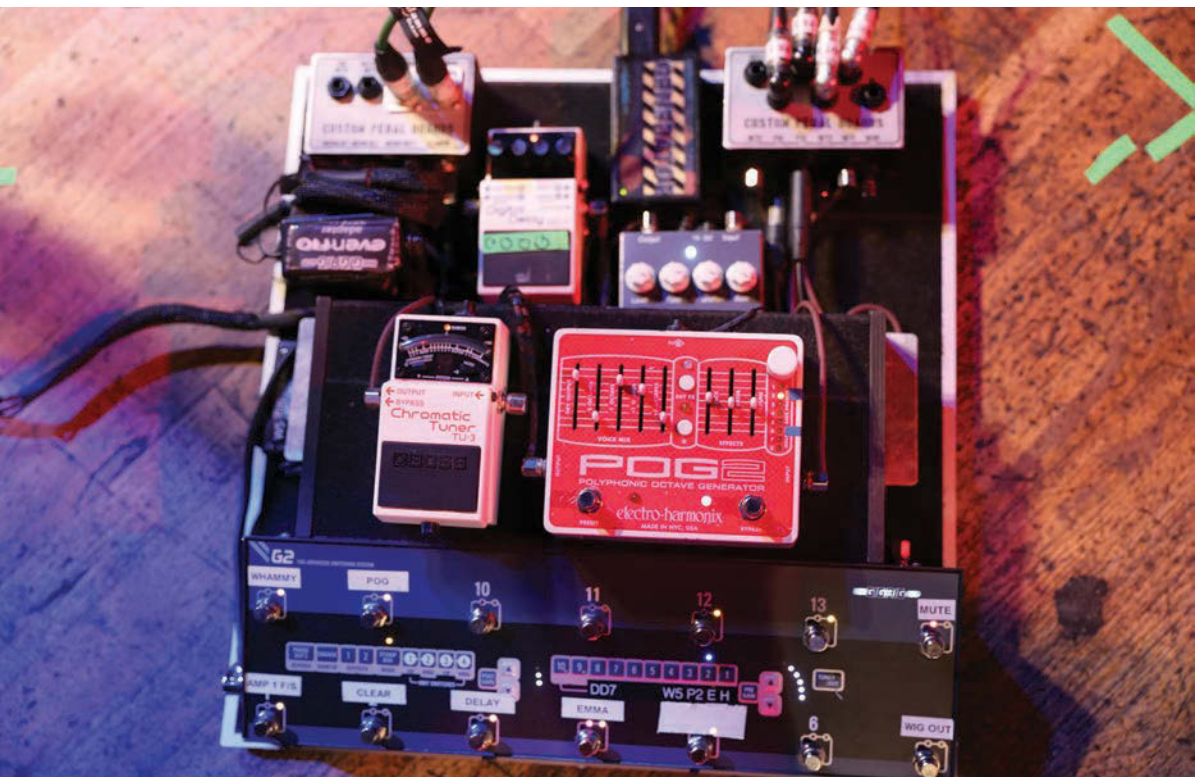


GUITAR

Murph keeps his guitar options simple so he can focus on the show, rather than buttons, knobs, and switches. This paisley-colored Fender Japan 1969 Telecaster reissue used to belong to Murph's dad. The tone knob and pickup selector have been removed and the neck has been replaced with a Mexican-made Fender neck due to road abuse.







AMPS

The key to Murph's tone is his small-but-mighty, three-amp backline. He runs a pair of Orange Dual Terrors into corresponding Orange 2x12 cabs.

He also uses an Orange Tiny Terror (with a Mesa/Boogie 1x12 cab pointed backwards). Even on fly dates Murph carries these amps and then rents whatever cabs he can in order to keep the tone consistent.

EFFECTS

The Gig Rig G2 is the nerve center of Murph's pedalboard. The G2 controls all stompboxes and handles the switching between his amps. After hitting a Boss TU-3 tuner, his signal goes into the G2 and then to a Gig Rig HumDinger, which sends a dry signal to the Tiny Terror. Packed into the G2's loops are an Emma Electronic Products OMP-1 OnoMATOpoeia, Electro-Harmonix POG 2, DigiTech Whammy 5, and a Boss DD-7 Digital Delay. Underneath the board made by Custom Pedal Boards UK is a Gig Rig Generator that provides the juice.


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1962 Gibson ES-175D

BY DAVE ROGERS, LAUN BRAITHWAITE, AND TIM MULLALLY

The Gibson ES-175 debuted in 1949 as an affordable yet high-quality professional alternative to the existing 17" wide ES-300 and ES-350 models. The same 16 ¼" body size of the cheaper ES-125 was used, but with an arched laminated maple back. A deep Florentine cutaway was introduced for a trouble-free reach to the high registers. A double-pickup version known as the ES-175D was eventually launched in 1953. Both models were available simultaneously until the single-pickup guitar was dropped in 1972. The ES-175 remains a top choice today for serious jazz musicians.

The 1962 catalog describes the ES-175's innovations: *"The Florentine cutaway design provides easy access to the entire fret range. Easy to play and comfortable to hold, it produces a brilliant distortion-free tone. Beautiful arched top and back of select maple with matching rims, black-and-white ivoroid binding, exclusive tailpiece, nickel-plated metal parts, and individual machine heads with deluxe buttons."*

The 1962 ES-175D pictured has the features most often associated with the classic incarnation of the model. These include PAF humbucking pickups (1957-1964), a zigzag tailpiece (1957-1970), double-ring Kluson tuners (replacing single-ring tuners in 1960), a rubber grommet under the selector switch (by 1958), and a laminated truss rod cover with a beveled white boarder (replacing the one-ply plain black cover in 1958). While the ES-175D was only officially offered in either sunburst or natural, this example is finished in cherry (a standard color for guitars in the ES-335 family). The 1962 list price was $340. The current value for this one is $10,000.

The amp behind the guitar is a 1962 Fender Vibrasonic. It was introduced in the summer of 1959 as the first of Fender's new brown Tolex amp series. These amps replaced the previous tweed covered models and had some practical modifications including a control panel in the front, rather than on the top, and built in tremolo. The Vibrasonic was equipped with two 6L6 power tubes pushing 40 watts through a 15" JBL speaker. The 1962 list price was $479.50. The current value for the amp is $2,500.

Sources for this article include *The Gibson ES-175: Its History and Players* by Adrian Ingram, *Gibson Electrics: The Classic Years* by A.R. Duchossoir, and *Fender Amps: The First Fifty Years* by John Teagle and John Sprung.

DAVE'S GUITAR SHOP

Dave Rogers' collection is tended by Laun Braithwaite and Tim Mullally and is on display at:
Dave's Guitar Shop
1227 Third Street South
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davesguitar.com
Photos by Mullally and text by Braithwaite.



Opposite page: This 1962 ES-175D shows its distinctive zigzag tailpiece while reclining against a Fender Vibrasonic amp from the same year. The amp was Fender's first Tolex model.

Left: Dual humbuckers—in this case, a set of original Gibson PAFs—earned this model of ES-175 its "D" designation.

Click here to hear this guitar at premierguitar.com

1999 Yamaha AEX-502

BY WILL RAY



Right: Although made in the late '90s, the AEX-502 has a vintage look, with its Les Paul-like contours, single-cutaway, two pickups, and top-mounted toggle switch.

Below: This back shot reveals a sturdy four-bolt neck junction and easy-access panels for reaching the pickup selector and tone and volume pots.

Years ago, when I was first flirting with P-90 equipped guitars, I ran across this beauty on eBay. It was a Yamaha AEX-502 semi-hollowbody with two P-90 pickups. I've never owned many Yamahas, but this one really spoke to me with its cool orange color, rounded cutaway, gold hardware, and two F-holes. A real looker, the guitar reminded me of the old '50s Guild Bluesbirds I'd run across at guitar shows. I bookmarked the auction and kept an eye on it while I did some research.

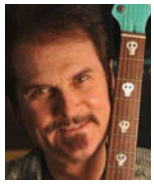
Bottom Feeder Tip #1163: It's always important to do careful research before buying a new or used guitar. You need to know a guitar's worth before bidding on it, and it's smart to read other players' reviews. I go to Sweetwater and similar sites to hear what real players on the front lines have to say. When I researched it, I learned these were made in the late 1990s. I also uncovered that a lot of blues guys would buy these and replace the weak, thin sounding P-90s with Gibsons and then have a very respectable blues monster for just a fraction of the price of a Gibson Les Paul. I was intrigued. Up until this point I'd never heard a pair of P-90s I couldn't live with, so I decided to go for it. I ended up winning the auction by sniping at the last minute for $242 plus $20 shipping.

When it arrived, the guitar looked gorgeous and played well. However, when I plugged it into an amp I was a bit underwhelmed. The stock pickups were a little too bright and weenie sounding for my tastes. But then I remembered I'd acquired a pair of Seymour Duncan P-90 Antiquities a while back that I was saving for just the right guitar. This was that guitar. I swapped out the pickups and was treated to some great blues tones.

Bottom Feeder Tip #285: Sometimes it's easier to simply swap out original pickups for some that you trust. It's a good idea to keep some extra pickups at home for just such an occasion, but always keep the original ones in the guitar case in the event that you sell the guitar later and need to put them back in. I never seem to go wrong with Seymours. Listen to my sound sample and you can hear their midrange growl and high-end sweetness.

So is it still a keeper? Yeah, for now. I really dig the way it plays and sounds. The resale value isn't much more than what I paid for mine 16 years ago. If I ever go to sell, I'll probably swap out the Seymours and put the originals back in.



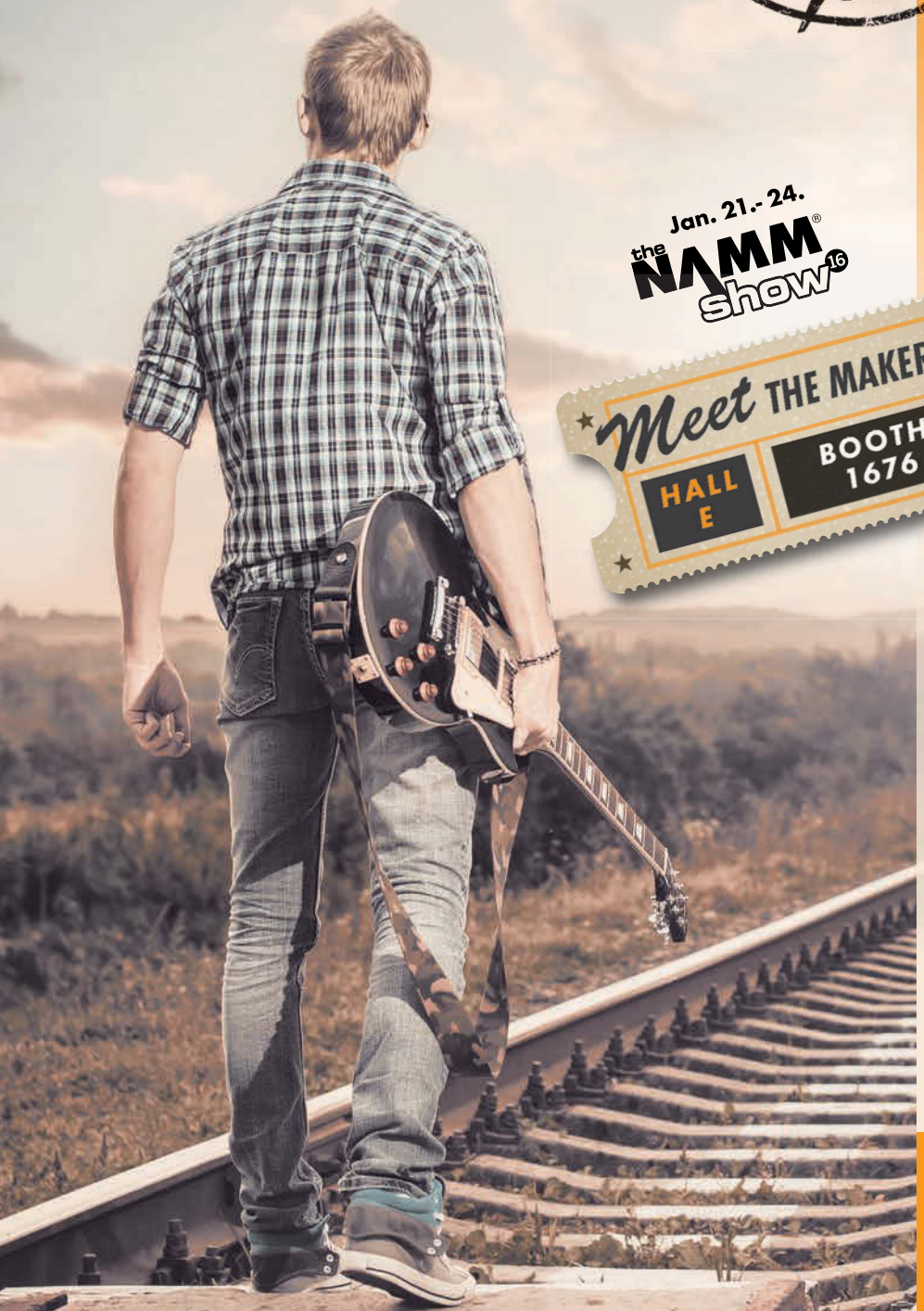


WILL RAY *is a founding member of the Hellecasters guitar-twang trio. He also does guitar clinics promoting his namesake G&L signature model 6-string, and produces artists and bands at his studio in Asheville, North Carolina. You can contact Will on Facebook and at willray.biz.*

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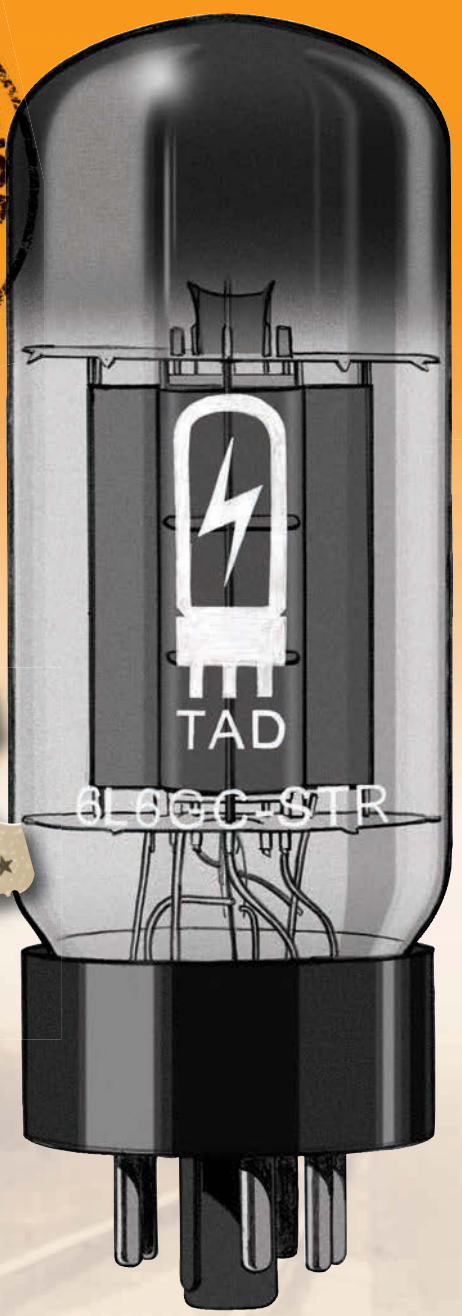
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Tim L. wanted something more versatile than his Big Muff, so he sold it and gave this gated fuzz a try.

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MXR DYNA COMP SCRIPT REISSUE

Chicken picker Joe G.'s first compressor. Sold it to buy a Keeley Compressor Pro.

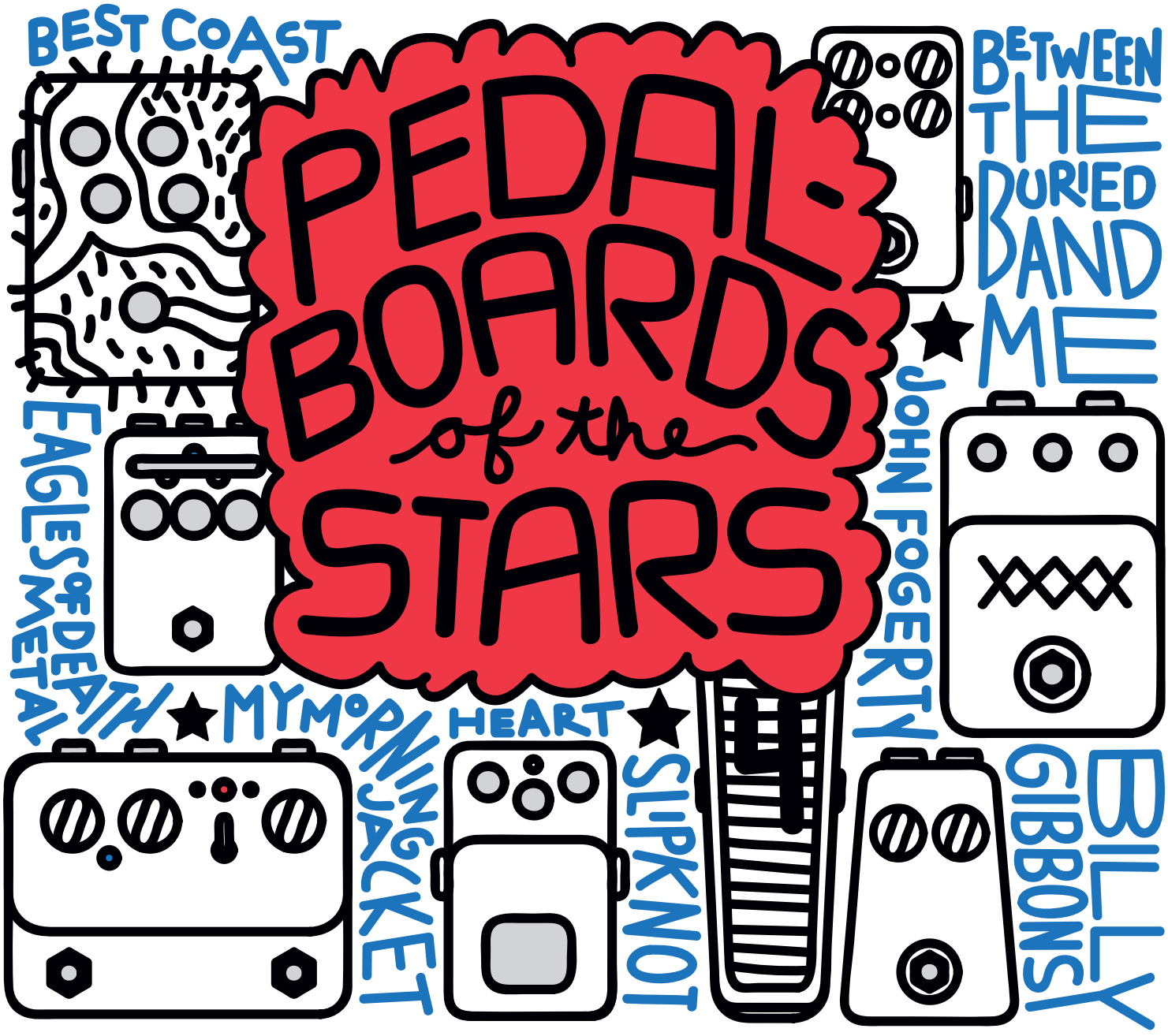
TC ELECTRONIC POLYTUNE MINI

Retail: $90 | Est Used Value $50 - $80

Jessica G. bought one to save space on her board.

Reverb.com

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PG *Rig Rundowns get up close and personal with some of the most intriguing pedalboards on the planet. Here's a behind-the-scenes look at eight of the most remarkable collections we've seen in quite some time.*

BY THE *PREMIER GUITAR* STAFF

For more on Bruno's and Cosentino's pedalboards, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

BEST COAST

Bobb Bruno and Bethany Cosentino

Perhaps even more so than his former roommate, Nels Cline, Best Coast's Bobb Bruno has a definite affinity for stompboxes. His board takes advantage of offerings from a slew of boutique outfits—including a couple of custom pedals whose aesthetics are as interesting as their tones—and his taste in pedals has also guided what front woman Bethany Cosentino stomps on.





Top: Upon first hitting his board, Bruno's signal goes into a TC Electronic PolyTune, heads to a TSVG Best Coast Signature Fluzzy (based on the old Ibanez Standard Fuzz), then goes to a custom American Loopers switcher (the white pedal with the green skull) that has an Electro-Harmonix Nano POG and a Mr. Black Eterna Gold in loop 1, and a Bigfoot FX Magnavibe and a Catalinbread Valcoder in loop 2. Bruno's "gnarly" Forever Fuzz—the pedal covered in purple-and-black faux fur—was given to him by Nels Cline and features a built-in filter circuit. A Strymon Tap Favorite switch triggers the tape-chorus simulation in Bruno's Strymon Deco, but he also uses the tape-delay simulation for slapback echo, and the tape-saturation section for solos and rhythm sounds. The Mid-Fi Electronics pedal next to the Tap Favorite houses two effects—a Psych Byke fuzz and Fuzz Wall—and the MXR Noise Clamp next door helps keep them manageable. An MI Audio Super Crunch Box, Bruno's main distortion, is used for roughly 75 percent of a given set. The board is rounded out by a Catalinbread Zero Point flanger, a TSVG Hard Stuff, a Strymon El Capistan, a Catalinbread Talisman plate-reverb simulator, and a Line 6 DL4 (not pictured).

Bottom: Cosentino's board is outfitted with a TC Electronic PolyTune 2, an Xotic EP Booster—which is on all the time—a Mojo Hand Fx Bluebonnet, a Wampler Euphoria, a HardWire/DigiTech Supernatural, a Malekko Ekko 616, and an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Nano that is also on all the time.


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For more on Waggoner's, Waring's, and Briggs' pedalboards, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME

Paul Waggoner, Dustie Waring, and Dan Briggs

Given their penchant for epic, complex arrangements, it should come as no surprise that the axe men of prog-metal outfit Between the Buried and Me warmly embrace stomp stations that can quickly morph tones in tons of ways.

Top: Both of BTBM's 6-stringers, Paul Waggoner and Dustie Waring, get the lion's share of their sounds from Fractal Audio Axe-Fx II XL rack units. Waggoner manipulates his presets using a Rocktron All Access foot controller and two Mission Engineering EP-1 expression pedals that control volume and delay times. A Strymon TimeLine is used for clean delay sounds, while a Wampler Faux Tape Echo provides longer, shimmering delays, a Port City Salem Boost helps solos cut through, a Wampler Leviathan brings the fuzz, and a TC Electronic PolyTune keeps his guitars in tune.

Middle: Waring navigates his Axe-Fx II XL presets with a Fractal Audio MFC-101 Mark III foot controller. Like Waggoner, he uses two Mission Engineering EP-1 expression pedals to tweak effect parameters, but the only two standard stompboxes in his live rig are a TC Electronic PolyTune Mini and a Port City Salem Boost, the latter of which he says makes things sound "huge, fat, and tube-y."

Bottom: BTBM bassist Dan Briggs's pedalboard includes a Boss TU-2 tuner, a Wampler Faux Tape Echo (used for a constant warbling tone), an Electro-Harmonix Bass Micro Synth (for washes like those on Rush's "Tom Sawyer"), three Boss stomps—a DD-3 digital delay, a TR-2 Tremolo, and a PS-3 pitch shifter—and a Darkglass Electronics Duality Fuzz.







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For more on Catching's and McJunkins' pedalboards, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

EAGLES OF DEATH METAL

Dave Catching and Matt McJunkins

Although Eagles of Death Metal singer/guitarist Jesse Hughes eschews pedals in favor of the simpler, rawer approach of going straight into his amps, touring guitarist Dave Catching (co-founder of famed Rancho De La Luna recording studio) and bassist Matt McJunkins more than make up for Hughes' dearth of stompable things onstage.

Top: Catching's signal first hits a TC Electronic PolyTune 2 Noir, then goes to a Jim Dunlop Cry Baby Wah—he loves leaving the pedal cocked open a bit for nasally solos and cutting riffs—then proceeds to a Jim Dunlop Rotovibe, an EarthQuaker Devices Palisades (for solo boosts), a Fulltone Ultimate Octave, a TC Electronic T2 reverb, an EarthQuaker Devices Dispatch Master, a TC Electronic Flashback Triple Delay, a Mantic Flex, and a Malekko Scrutator bit-crusher.

Bottom: Because McJunkins runs his amps hot, he looks to get extremely overdriven and wonky sounds out of his three pedals—a germanium Malekko B:Assmaster that "smoothly adds some bass, girth, and fatness" to his core sound, a ZVEX Mastotron for synth-like tones, and a Malekko Scrutator. Other utility units on his board include a Boss TU-3 tuner, a Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus, and an active Radial J48 direct box that sends a clean signal to the front-of-house soundboard.







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For more on Wilson's pedalboard, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

HEART
Nancy Wilson

To dial in tones while playing live versions of canonical classic-rock hits such as "Barracuda," "Magic Man," and "Crazy on You," Nancy Wilson relies on a handful of stomps controlled in the wings from stage right by longtime tech Jeff Ousley. Her electric signal hits her board by way of a Whirlwind A/B selector, then travels to an Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, a Way Huge Swollen Pickle, an ancient Ibanez flanger, and a Budda ZenMan OD/Boost. A Voodoo Lab Pedal Power supplies the juice, and channel switcher pedals for each of Wilson's amp heads (a Peavey-era Budda Superdrive 30 II and a backup Fender Tone-Master) round out the board.



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For more on Fogerty's pedals, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

JOHN FOGERTY



To conjure the gritty, throbbing tones of American roots-rock mainstays like "Fortunate Son," "Proud Mary," and "Born on the Bayou," former Creedence Clearwater Revival frontman John Fogerty stomps on a wide array of vintage-toned boxes—including several off-the-beaten-path boutique selections that prove the classic-rock god is as into guitar gear as ever. His pedals reside in two offstage rack drawers, where they are controlled by Fogerty's guitar tech, Dave Whiston.



Top: Fogerty's first rack drawer features a Moog Minifooger MF Delay, a Strymon El Capistan, a SolidGoldFX Surf Rider, an ancient Zeta Systems vibrato/tremolo, and an Electro-Harmonix Small Clone, all powered by a Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus.

Bottom: The second rack drawer includes a Wren and Cuff Box of War, three Xotic RC Boosters (labeled Curly, Larry, and Moe), a Boss RV-5 digital reverb, a Voodoo Lab Tremolo, and a Strymon BigSky. The pedals on this board get their juice from a Custom Audio Electronics power brick.



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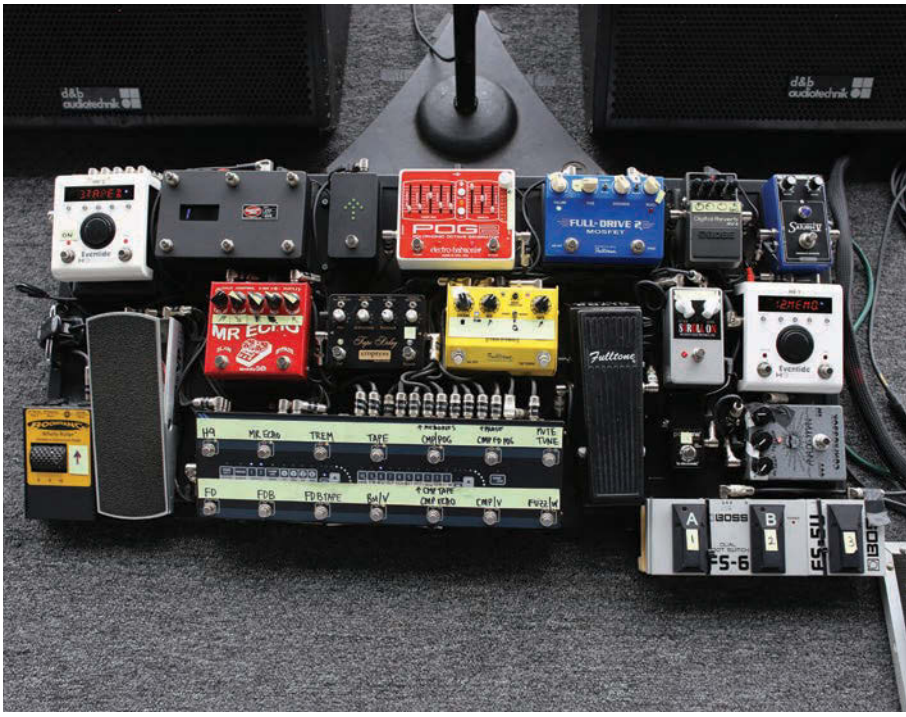
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For more on Broemel's pedalboards, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

MY MORNING JACKET

Carl Broemel

Kentucky-based quintet My Morning Jacket steeps its rich sound in everything from roots and psych rock to plaintive country, with a unique, flavorful final brew that's tied together by the soaring vocals of frontman Jim James. But while the flamboyant James (who also plays guitar) tends to get the lion's share of MMJ attention, lead guitarist Carl Broemel's chameleonic qualities—including his ability to switch from standard 6-string to the more complicated world of pedal steel—are just as crucial in defining the veteran band's sound. Here we look at the gear Broemel uses to replicate tunes from seven studio albums on the road.





Top: The control center for Broemel's board is a GigRig G2 switching system that lets him quickly access a wide range of pedal settings and combinations. Stomps controlled by the G2 include a TC Electronic PolyTune Mini, an Analog Man CompROSSor, Hudson Electronics Stroll On fuzz, Spaceman Saturn V Harmonic Booster, Fulltone Full-Drive 2, Boss RV-5 Digital Reverb, Empress Tape Delay, SIB Mr. Echo, Electro-Harmonix POG2, Fulltone Supa-Trem, an Ernie Ball volume pedal, and a pair of Eventide H9s. (One H9 routes to a separate MIDI controller and the Boomerang Wholly Roller.)

Bottom: For his pedal steel musings, Broemel's board includes a Hilton Electronics volume pedal, Sarno Music Solutions Steel Guitar Black Box, MiniMoog MF Delay, an Eventide ModFactor, EarthQuaker Devices Dispatch Master, and a Durham Electronics Sex Drive. He controls all the effects via a Voodoo Lab Pedal Switcher.



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For more on Thomson's and Root's pedals, click here to watch the Rig Rundown.

SLIPKNOT
Mick Thomson and Jim Root

Considering not only how tight and precise their down-tuned, interlocking riffs must be, but also the dense, nine-person mix they must fit into, it makes perfect sense that Jim Root and Mick Thomson from blockbuster Des Moines metal outfit Slipknot keep their pedalboards pretty trim and straightforward. In fact, arguably the biggest lesson to be learned from their stomp stations is how subtly and sparingly their effects are used.





Top: Thomson's rack drawer houses six effects, plus a Voodoo Lab Pedal Power ISO-5 and a Peterson Stomp Classic tuner. His noisemakers include a Maxon OD-820 Overdrive Pro for lead boosts, an Electro-Harmonix Bassballs (used on "Disasterpiece"), an MXR Carbon Copy (used for parts of "Vermillion"), a Death by Audio Fuzz War, and a custom-made octave fuzz created by tech Kevin Allen after Thomson requested the filthiest, gnarliest, most obnoxious-sounding fuzz box possible—because, as the guitarist sees it, "the fuzz better fuck your sound up." The custom fuzz is used for parts of "Duality." Allen uses a Voodoo Lab Ground Control Pro from offstage to activate Thomson's various effect combinations.

Bottom: Root's drawer of stomps is home to an old Boss NS-2 Noise Suppressor—he says the updated circuitry and lead-free solder in new versions impact his sound too much—an MXR Auto Q wah, Maxon AF-9 envelope filter and PT-9 Pro+ phaser pedals, two MXR Carbon Copy delays, and Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Nano and Micro POG stomps. A T-Rex FuelTank Classic powers it all. Root's onstage satellite board includes a controller for his Dunlop Cry Baby Rack Module wah, a third MXR Carbon Copy for creating oscillation chaos, a Maxon FV10 Fuzz Elements Void, an MXR GT-OD, and a Dunlop JH1D Jimi Hendrix wah—the latter of which he likes for its traditional, early-Vox-like sound. The wah is connected to a G-Lab True Bypass Wah-Pad, which not only makes the pedal true-bypass but also removes the need to push the rocker pedal toe down to activate the effect.



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ZZ TOP
Billy Gibbons



Anyone remotely familiar with "the Reverend" Billy Gibbons' ZZ Top catalog won't be too shocked by the dearth of pedals used to conjure his gritty Texas-blues tones on his current touring board. Probably the biggest surprise here is that while he has two sets of pedals (for redundancy in case one rig goes out), the pedals are not exactly the same in both setups—although this is something that tech Elwood Francis attributes to the simple fun of periodically trying out new toys as they are acquired on the road. The two stomp setups, like the rest of Gibbons' rig components, are kept in two offstage racks.

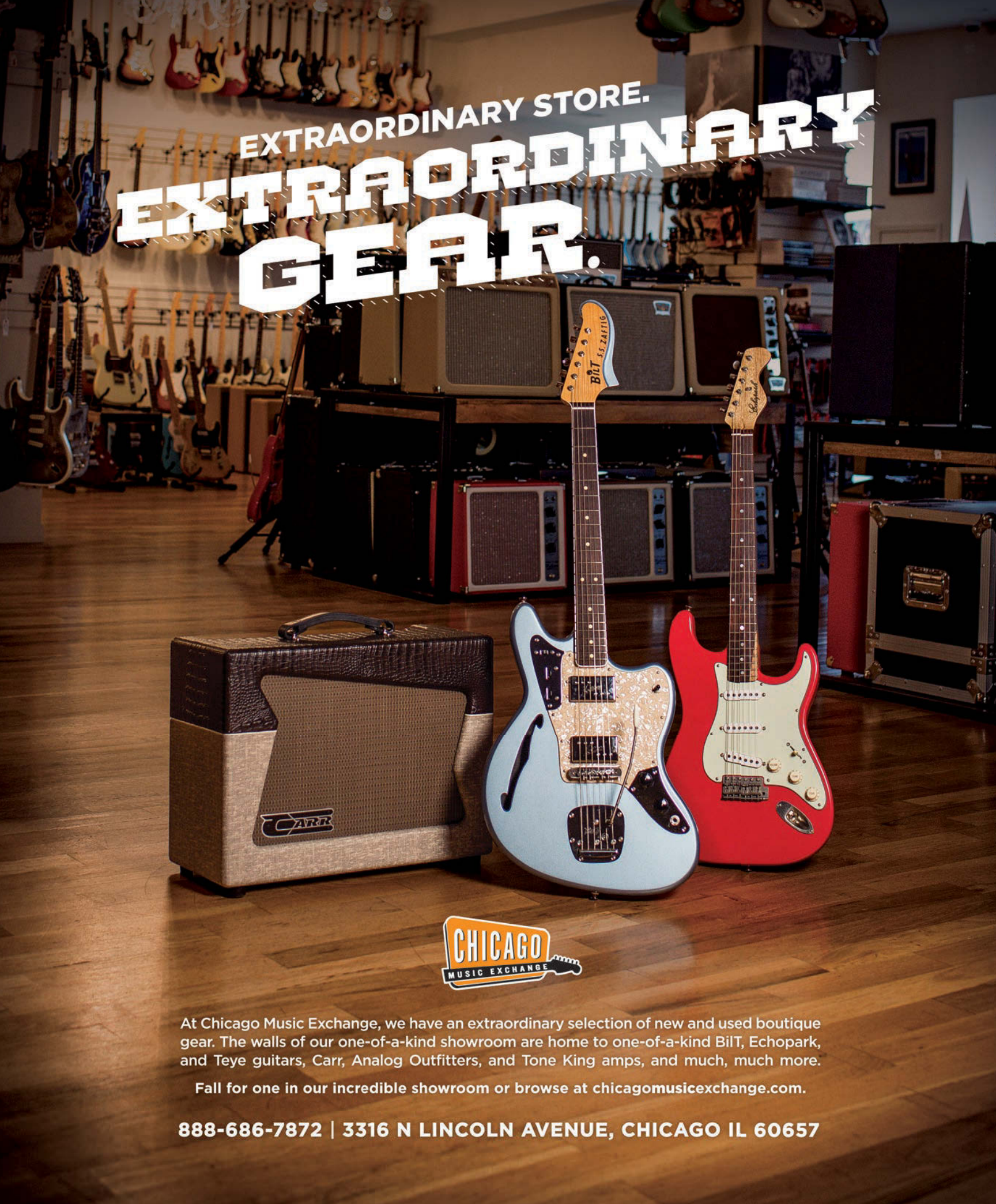
Top: In this setup, Gibbons gets a boost and a little extra dirt from a Rainger FX El Distorto, while an MXR JHM2 Jimi Hendrix 70th Anniversary Tribute Series Octavio provides octave-fuzz tones, an Electro-Harmonix Pitch Fork alters pitch, and an MXR Carbon Copy adds a touch of analog-delay ambience. Tuning is handled by a Peterson Strobe Classic, and various distortion presets in a Marshall JMP-1 rack unit (not pictured) are accessed via a Tech 21 MIDI Mouse.

Bottom: This pedal drawer is similar to the other in that it also has a Peterson tuner (a StroboStomp 2), a Tech 21 MIDI Mouse, an MXR Carbon Copy, and a Dunlop JHOC1 Jimi Hendrix Octavio (which is purportedly the same circuit as the MXR JHM2), but here further pitch-shifting needs are fulfilled by an MXR Bass Octave Deluxe, and the Octavio runs through a Boss GE-7 graphic-EQ pedal.





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JUST LIKE THAT BLUEBIRD

__Ben Monder__ and __Tim Lefebvre__ take us inside the sessions for late rock legend __David Bowie__'s prescient and profoundly moving final masterpiece.

BY DAVID VON BADER



A still of the inimitable David Bowie from the video for "Blackstar."



Bowie performing live circa 1991.

Photo by Ken Settle

David Bowie was an artist of unprecedented vision, poise, intelligence, charm, and, most importantly, truly fearless creativity. He reinvented what it meant to be a rock star, redefined himself with each release, and never once grew complacent. Even as he faced the increasing possibility of impending death during 18 months of treatment for cancer he kept secret from all but the closest collaborators, Bowie could not help but continue to exist as a conduit for the creative energies he'd spent his life harnessing and honing in ways that were always unexpected, always ahead of the pack, and typically stunning in their final forms—musical or otherwise.

Since the shocking news of his death at the age of 69 on January 10, 2016, Bowie's swan song—the heartbreaking and musically challenging *Blackstar*—has been revealed to be far more than just another work of musical genius to add to a nearly infallible canon: It's the man's goodbye letter to all, an artistically wrought final statement that sees a musical titan struggling with his own mortality and the immortality of art, all wrapped-up in a haunting auto-eulogy. Full of thinly shrouded allusions to his own fate, *Blackstar* also serves as the final cheeky wink and knowing smile of Bowie's illustrious career. As longtime friend and producer Tony Visconti so eloquently put it, Bowie's death "was not different from his life—a work of art."

When this feature first began taking shape weeks before the release of *Blackstar*, it was undertaken with great excitement over the fact that the semi-reclusive legend had not only decided to release another record, but was also rumored to be doing so in collaboration with some of the most respected names in the avant-garde jazz world, including prolific guitarist Ben Monder, not to mention bassist Tim Lefebvre from Tedeschi Trucks Band, among others. To say the creative ramifications of this pairing were viewed as an exciting prospect is a gross understatement, but the jarring news of Bowie's passing just two days after the album's release—as well as of his private battle that went on for so long behind the scenes—puts the work in a profoundly different light. Yes, *Blackstar* lives up to and even surpasses musical expectations. But when experienced with the knowledge that it is the final realized vision of a man who was fighting an extended, debilitating health crisis, the jazz-infused, electro-tinged sonic odyssey becomes a work of astonishing depth and openness whose meaning changes with each listen and carries with it a nearly unfathomable weight of finality. No matter your age or condition, the video for "Lazarus" is bound to strike you at least as much with its stark imagery and the gut-wrenching delivery of its grim lyrics as it does with its lovely, dirge-like riff, the hypnotic beauty of its reverberating guitar-and-sax stabs, and its frenetically catchy chorus.

Bowie and his art have touched innumerable lives, but few more personally than those of the musicians he chose to welcome into his realm for collaboration. Working with Bowie was a transformative experience by most accounts, and those with the talent and good fortune to have forged a creative relationship with the Starman (or Thin White Duke, or whichever persona Bowie had developed into at any given point) all seemed to blossom and grow within his orbit—though never in sacrifice of the personalities and talents that brought them into his periphery in the first place. We gained an audience with Monder and Lefebvre prior to *Blackstar*'s release, and again shortly after Bowie's passing, to discuss the making of the album and the impact of working with one of the most important artists of our time.


Kindly remember:
the ridiculous hype
that offends so many
is not of my making.



“David is an example of an artist going to the limits of his imagination, and having the courage and genius to bring his discoveries to life.” —Ben Monder

Ben Monder with his 1982 Ibanez AS-50.

Were you at all aware that you might be helping David make his final artistic statement to the world?

Ben Monder: No, I had absolutely no idea. He looked great and was in great spirits. There were certainly some dark overtones to the material, but that’s not unusual for him. I would never have read such grave significance into them.

Tim Lefebvre: Not exactly. Who knows if he meant for it to be this way, but it sure looks like he did. It’s surreal. When we were *doing* the record it was surreal, but you go into professional mode and just try to do the best you can. The first time I heard the album, I said to the guys, “This is so much bigger than all of us.” Now, with him passing, it’s just such a mindfuck. Tony said it was his gift to everyone, and it’s very intense now.

How did you come to be involved with *Blackstar*?

Monder: The first version of the cut “Sue (Or in a Season of Crime)”—which came out a couple of years ago as a bonus track on *Nothing Has Changed* [Bowie’s 2014 3-disc box set]—was put together in collaboration with my friend Maria Schneider, who I’ve worked with for years. I was talking to her on the phone one day and she goes, “You know, David Bowie is coming over to my apartment,” and I was just, like, “*What?*” She invited me to take part in the session that came from that meeting. We all met and it was one rehearsal and maybe one day in the studio tracking the tune. Eventually Maria took David to hear Donny McCaslin play sax at the 55 Bar in New York City with his band. David apparently found that performance really inspirational and wanted to work with Donny. I think it was originally supposed to be just a few tracks, but it blossomed into a full record. Since I had played in Donny’s band for a long time, Donny—luckily for me—called me up to do whatever guitar parts the album needed.

Lefebvre: I had been playing in Donny’s band, and beyond that Mark [Guiliana, drums], Jason [Lindner, keys], and I had been playing in a project called Beat Music even before joining Donny’s band.

Photo by John Rogers

What was it like to be working with such a legend?

Monder: It was amazing. There's the part of you that's totally overwhelmed and can't believe you're working with someone you've been listening to since you were 12 years old, but there's also the side of you that goes into professional mode. I've done hundreds of recordings, and you have to get into the mindset that you're there as a professional and you're going to just do the best you can. So, that's really what took over when I was recording. That said, I also never felt uncomfortable. As far as the work environment goes, Tony [Visconti, producer] and David made it *really* easy for us. David really made an effort to make us all feel welcome and at ease, and he was extremely open-minded about anything we had to contribute. So the environment was really, really positive. David truly respected what other people have to offer—he wasn't a control freak in the slightest and really wanted to work *with* his collaborators. And Tony is the same way.

Lefebvre: Mark and I talked about this a bit and it's amazing how open-minded they were as a team. On "Sue (Or in a Season of Crime)," for example, they gave us eight bars to just *rage*. Mark and I had played a lot of live drum 'n' bass together, and it's shocking and amazing to hear that on a David Bowie record—they allowed us to do what *we* do on this album! I think the stuff David wrote would've been amazing with any band, but it's unreal to have been involved. Yes, he happened to hire a band that was a unit, but it's not like David simply inserted himself in our world. He demoed these things really well and could have had *any* studio musicians in the world play these songs. He just happened to want guys with chemistry playing them, so it was very cool.

What do you remember about the first sessions, Ben?

Monder: It was actually kind of unclear in the beginning how much I would even contribute. I thought maybe it would just be a couple of tunes at first. I had been given a couple of mockup demos that David had done in his home studio, so I wasn't going in *totally* cold. I had a few ideas of what I was going to do on some of the tunes, but there wasn't a ton of preparation. The first track we worked on was "Blackstar," which was one of the ones I had a mockup of, so I had some ideas about which chords I was going to play, and Donny had made some relatively simple charts so I could follow the structure. It wound up being a lot of the first take used on the final track.

What did you hope to bring to the record, given that David was seeking something with a jazz foundation of sorts?

Monder: People say that, but I don't really see it as him hiring a bunch of *strict* jazz musicians. We're all improvisers, but every one of us has roots in rock

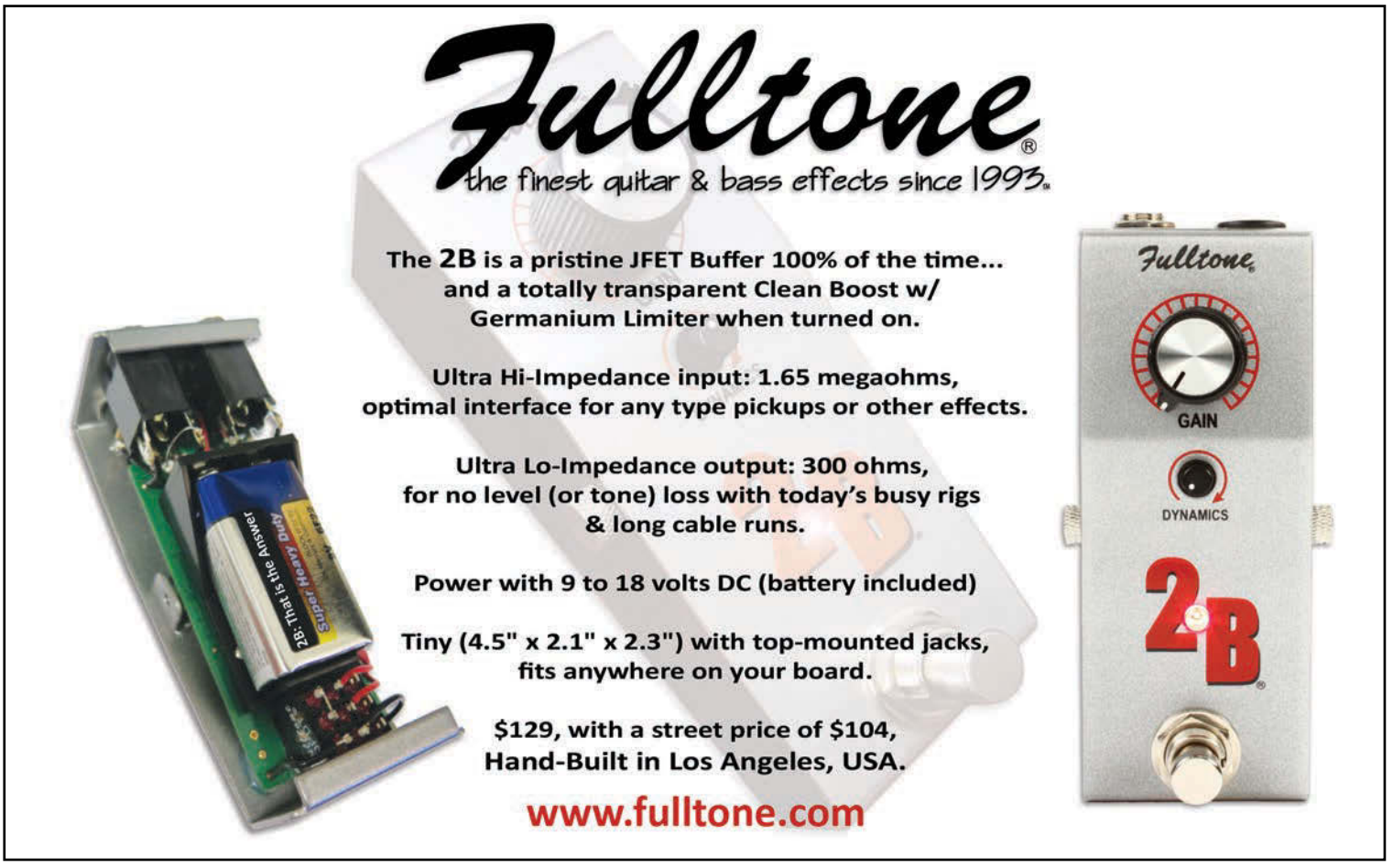




Photo by Ken Settle



Photo by Takahiro Kyono

music—especially Tim and Mark. And those guys are also equally comfortable in electronic music and groove-based stuff.

I came into this record with the idea that I'd have as open a mind as possible, and try to do my best to adorn the tunes presented to me in the most personal way I could without losing or sacrificing the character of the material. I didn't necessarily know what that was going to *be*, but it wasn't really unfamiliar territory because I've been listening to Bowie's music for so long, and I knew Donny and the rest of the band so well. I think I had the confidence that if I just stayed relaxed and open to the moment, I'd be able to come up with the appropriate things.

"Blackstar" in particular sounds very spontaneous in a lot of ways. It's polished, but it's still very lively and organic.
Monder: There's definitely a fresh energy to it, and that's certainly got something to do with so much of it being a first take. But the song has its two distinct parts, and David basically said, "Somehow dissolve this into the next section of the tune." Somehow we did that dissolution perfectly on the first attempt, and that's what you're hearing on the album—no punching-in or anything. We did the middle section separately, but the way it all dissolves into it was totally improvised. There wasn't an effort made to over-polish or overproduce it.
Lefebvre: The title track was demoed *really* well before we got there. That drum pattern was pretty specific—the first part of it, with all of the droning stuff, is sticking to David's plan. The middle part, where it sort of swings into the major key, that was more improvised. I got pretty loose on that. Mark was playing a pretty simple beat, so I tried to fill it out with some '60s, Serge Gainsbourg-inspired stuff and some Justin Meldal-Johnsen kinda busy pick-bass stuff. In the third part of it, I went into sort of a Sly Stone or Pino Palladino mode, playing loose fills over the top of it.

Ben, there's a twinkling, upper-register guitar lick that juts in and out on "Blackstar." What are we hearing there?
Monder: I was using the shimmer effect on the Strymon BlueSky [Reverberator] pedal for that part, so that might be why it's got that upper register sheen to it and all of those nice overtones.

Tim, you mentioned chemistry earlier. What would you point to as evidence of the difference that chemistry made?
Lefebvre: The intro and outro on "Lazarus" are the kind of thing we've done as a team live a lot. Little subtle touches between myself and Mark and Jason came through in the record quite a bit. It's subtle, but it's there if you pay attention.

Ben, as such a well-educated player, were you ever afraid that thinking too much about theory would trounce the improvisational flair of the sessions?
Monder: That's the real challenge—you need to have the discipline to forget

Opposite page: David Bowie onstage in 1990.

Above: Tim Lefebvre onstage with the Tedeschi Trucks Band in 2014.

what you know. The ultimate purpose of all the theory is to enable your ears to hear things they wouldn't normally hear without that knowledge. It's like a symbiotic relationship: Your ears can lead your intellect to new discoveries, and those new discoveries will lead your ears to hear things they might not have been able to hear without the knowledge. So, it's hard to say what exactly is going on mentally when one is improvising. In a way, your fingers are simply going where they go, but they are also informed by everything you've learned and everything you've digested. The idea is to trust your unconscious to take over, to trust that you have enough knowledge that if you don't control it, it'll find a way to do something interesting and creative. Then you sit back and watch it happen, but the idea is to get out of the way of letting it happen.

How involved was David with the band's tracking?
Monder: Oh, he was singing with us on pretty much every take. He was there in the studio with us singing in full voice—which really helped the energy. He sounded great and his voice was really strong. It really helped that the sessions felt like a real performance. He's a chameleon in a way, but he always had a really clear identity and concept in mind. It's always his vision.

Did David and Tony play a heavy role in making tonal choices?
Monder: I don't think we ever discussed specific sounds or tonal ideas. The requests stayed vague for the most part—they asked for atmospheric things, textural things. They never took issue with any of the sounds or colors I used. Sometimes a part wouldn't work, of course, but there wasn't any real talk about the tones used.
Lefebvre: They'd say if it was too extreme or something, but other than that we were left to our own discretion about how we wanted stuff to sound—as long as it was in the character of the song. That said, as I mentioned before, David had pretty specific demos so we tried to keep things pretty close to those, at least part-wise.

A lot of the tracks have dense textures where individual instruments almost blur into one another. Can you talk about some of the guitar subtleties that might not be immediately apparent to listeners?
Monder: I overdubbed the sort-of Phrygian-sounding chords on the title track a couple of times with a pretty distorted sound, and then again with a clean tone and that shimmer setting on the Strymon BlueSky. I think Tony and David brought the distorted part in and out a lot as needed. There were also a lot of high-harmonic textural parts on a couple of tunes. On "Sue," they asked for something atmospheric over one part of the song, and my go-to trick was turning the mix on my Lexicon LXP-1 [half-rack reverb unit] all the way up, as well as putting the delay and decay all the way up—which makes this giant wash of sound and makes whatever note you play sound *really* good. And whatever other pedals you add into the mix are further accentuated by that wash.

Speaking of "Sue," tell us about the big, semi-quirky rock riff.
Monder: I'm basically just doubling the bass line. At one point, Tim moved something around in an interesting way and I just stuck with him, so that part is more reinforcing the bass line than anything. I believe I tracked that song with my "Partscaster" Strat[-style] for the main, single-line lick, but the harmonics are always my Ibanez—they just don't pop out as well on the Strat. [*Ed. note: See sidebars for a full list of Monder's and Lefebvre's gear.*]

The lead you take at the end of "Dollar Days" is one of the most rocking parts on the whole album. Was that improvised?
Monder: I recall Tony had a suggestion for a vague line going through that part of the tune, but he didn't have specific notes. He sort of had a contour of the line in mind and I came up with the

BEN MONDER'S GEAR

GUITARS
- 1982 Ibanez AS-50
- "Partscaster" S-style with ESP neck, Fernandes body, vintage Fender middle and bridge pickups, and an unknown neck pickup

AMPS
- 1965 Fender Deluxe Reverb
- 1968 Fender Princeton Reverb with 30-watt 6L6 output section

EFFECTS
- Strymon BlueSky Reverberator
- MXR Carbon Copy
- Fulltone Mini DejáVibe
- Keeley-modded Pro Co RAT
- Walrus Audio Mayflower
- Walrus Audio Deep Six
- Aguilar Octamizer
- Lexicon LXP-1

STRINGS & PICKS
- D'Addario .013 set with an unwound .020 G (Ibanez AS-50)
- D'Addario .010 set (S-style)
- D'Andrea Pro Plec teardrop 1.5 mm

TIM LEFEBVRE'S GEAR

BASSES
- 1968 Fender Precision
- Moollon P-style

AMPS
- Ampeg B-15N

EFFECTS
- MXR Carbon Copy Bright
- 3Leaf Audio Octabvre
- Boss OC-2 Octave
- Amptweaker TightFuzz
- Darkglass Electronics Vintage Deluxe

STRINGS & PICKS
- DR .050-.110
- DR flatwounds
- Dunlop Max Grip .73 mm

notes. It was mapped out pretty well by the time we tracked it.

Do you have a favorite contribution to the album?
Monder: The repetitive melodic line in the title track was something I came up with on the overdub date, and it turned into a recurring theme and an important part of that tune that led the rest of the melody in a lot of ways. So that's pretty thrilling for me.
Lefebvre: I played some guitar as well as the bass on "Girl Loves Me," so I'm really proud of that. It was David's guitar that I used, and I just went in and doubled the bass line. That's kind of my favorite tune on the record, though it's all really great so it's hard to say which is my favorite.

What are your thoughts on the gravity of *Blackstar* as the final statement from an icon? Has the meaning of the lyrics or video visuals changed for you at all?
Lefebvre: Well, I understand some of the lyrics better now, and that makes me love it even more and take even more pride in taking part on Bowie's last album—not in a cocky way. It's a heavy thing. It seems like he knew it would be his last now, and it's just wild. The references to his own mortality, the symbolism in the "Lazarus" video—it's all spelled out. And he went out in a ball of flames. It's been pretty emotional for me, but the way this all unfolded is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. None of it's set in yet.
Monder: I remember really loving the songs the way they were when he brought them into the studio. They were inspired and unique, with tightly crafted yet odd structures, and they offered lots of ways to dig into them. Speaking more as a fan than as a participant, when I finally heard the record I was taken with its dark beauty and with what a great job they did with the production. I found it simultaneously raw, elegant, and intense, but I didn't see it as more than a collection of great songs. With his death, it has obviously broadened into a beautiful, self-penned epitaph. As poetic a farewell message as I've ever heard—poignant, but oblique and challenging enough that it really penetrates to our core. David is an example of an artist going to the limits of his imagination, and having the courage and genius to bring his discoveries to life. And he did this consistently for decades. How could that not be inspiring?



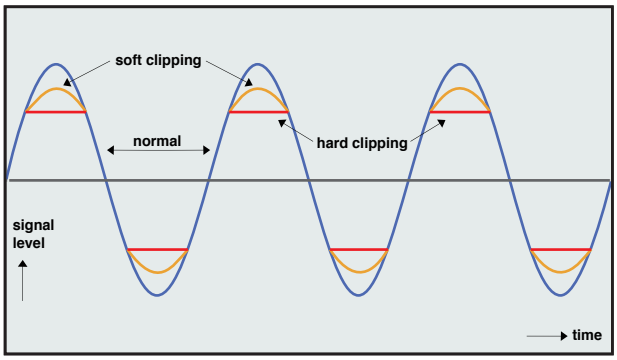
YOUTUBE IT

David Bowie's haunting video for "Lazarus" is rife with existential messages and now-obvious clues about the musician's impending death.
YouTube search term: David Bowie - Lazarus



Overdrives and Distortions and Boosts, Oh My

BY PETER THORN



Overdrives and distortions both add distortion to your signal, but are differentiated by the level of clipping their circuits perform.

I recently received a message via Facebook asking if I could break down the differences between some of the more popular boost, overdrive, and distortion pedals. Though they're all essentially designed to do similar things, there is often confusion when it comes to these devices.

I'd like to get something out of the way first: Overdrive and distortion units *both* add distortion to your guitar signal! A general distinction is that overdrive devices typically have circuits designed for soft clipping, while distortions have circuits that clip the signal more severely. This means that less of the signal is clipped in an overdrive circuit (resulting in a softer sound), whereas the more-aggressive hard clipping of a distortion creates more of a square-wave, harder-edged tone.

Boost pedals generally don't have clipping circuits, and therefore add no overdrive of their own to the signal. They are "pure gain" devices, designed to simply raise the level coming from your guitar pickups (and sometimes add some EQ to the signal). That said, boost pedals *will* cause your amp to overdrive at higher-gain settings, and, in turn, some overdrives can function much like boosts if their level or volume is set high and the gain is set low or all the way off.

Overdrive units generally tend to sound best running into amps set anywhere from the edge of breakup to crunchy. Good overdrives will meld with the amp and create a more complex overdrive texture than the amp is capable of on its own, while leaving the core tone from the amp intact.

Distortions typically sound best into amps that are set rather clean. In my experience, adding hard-clipped distortion from a pedal to an already crunchy, hard-clipped amp circuit can sound a bit ugly (in a bad way). Also important to note is that some distortion units that tend towards aggressive, bright tones can sound rather nasty when running into amps that feature bright switches or bright caps on the volume pot.

Boosts usually sound good on their own, but you can place a boost before distortion and overdrive to add grind and more overdrive to an already gain-y tone, or after distortion and overdrive to add volume for a solo or to make a part stand out.

TS types. The venerable Ibanez Tube Screamer is the most famous of all overdrive pedals and has inspired countless other pedal designs. Tonally, they are mid forward with a soft and warm overdrive sound. There's typically some bass attenuation going on with TS-type pedals, which works well with most Fender-type amps. (Fender and Fender-type amps generally have a mid-scooped tone and lots of treble and bass, so it's a perfect contrast.)

Klon Centaur types. The Klon—and Klon variants—are also overdrives, but can almost act like clean-boost pedals when set with the gain low and the volume up. Also somewhat mid forward (but less so than a TS type), to my ear they are generally more tonally neutral. I think of the Klon as a "more pedal," one that beefs up your amp's core tone by giving you *more* of it.

Fulltone OCD. This pedal was designed to deliver everything from light overdrive to a saturated, 18-watt Marshall-type grind. The OCD is a good example of a versatile pedal that blurs the lines between overdrive and distortion. You can use it with the gain set lower in front of an already overdriven amp, or crank up the gain in front of a clean amp and let the pedal do all the distortion work.

Carl Martin Plexitone. This distortion is definitely a harder-edged gain pedal, best with a neutral (not too much bass or treble) clean tone such as the normal channel of a Vox AC30. The name of the game here is ample bass and sizzling top end, much like a real plexi or early metal-panel Marshall Super Lead.

Boss DS-1. The DS-1 has been around for close to four decades and creates a hard-clipped distortion sound that many pros have used to great effect. Steve Vai has had one on his pedalboard for as long as I can remember. Steve runs the tone control quite low, at 9 or 10 o'clock, to smooth out the sound, and he tends to stack the DS-1 into his amp set for a crunch tone. This contradicts what I said earlier about running hard-clipped units into hard-clipped amp tones. It also serves to highlight the truth that there are no rules when it comes to tone.

MXR Micro Amp. This is the original clean-boost pedal. It adds no overdrive of its own—just clean gain to your guitar signal. Hit the front end of your clean amp with it and it'll raise your volume substantially. Hit the front of an already dirty amplifier and you can pummel your amp into submission!

Suhr Koko Boost. This is a favorite of mine—a clean boost and a mid boost in one pedal. It's a forward-thinking design that allows for a pure-gain boost—*and* a focused, tunable mid boost that can help licks and solos really cut through the mix.

There's never been a time when more effects pedals were available. This is a boon for us guitarists, but it *can* create option anxiety. I hope I was able to dispel some of the mysteries surrounding the differences between overdrives and distortions, and until next month, I wish you great tone!



PETER THORN
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(Rival Sons)



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~ Tommy Johnston
(The Doobie Brothers)



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(Creed, Alter Bridge)



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~ Devin Townsend
(Guitarist-songwriter-producer)



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~ David Sanchez
(Havoc)



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~ Alan Wallace
(Eminence)

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LETHAL METAL

Anthrax main man ***Scott Ian*** *and new lead guitarist* ***Jon Donais*** *talk about tone, soloing strategies, building explosive rhythm chops, their new signature gear, and the back-to-thrash game plan for the band's latest,* For All Kings.

BY TZVI GLUCKIN

Hate thrash metal? Blame Anthrax. Anthrax was built on outrageous tempos, extreme heaviness, and too much testosterone. Founded in 1981, they were the second band Jon Zazula signed to his new label, the influential Megaforce Records (Metallica was the first), and in 1984 released their debut, *Fistful of Metal*.

They went on to record seminal albums like *Spreading the Disease* and *Among the Living*, collaborate with rap legends Public Enemy, build an enormous and loyal fan base, and redefine heavy metal. Thirty-five years, endless tours, millions in sales, six Grammy nominations, and a number of band members later, Anthrax is still making serious noise.

Anthrax's core is guitarist Scott Ian. The Keith Richards of thrash, Ian plays *rhythm* guitar. His playing is rooted in heavy downstrokes, hypersonic alternate picking, Iron Maiden-style gallops, and super-tight unison ricochets with drummer Charlie Benante. Ian writes a lot of classic-sounding riffs, too, though he is matter-of-fact about the process. "I hear something in my head, pick up a guitar, and dick around with it until I think it sounds cool," he says. "I record it into my phone and forget about it until it is time for the band to make a record. That's my process."

In 2013, Anthrax recruited Shadows Fall guitarist Jon Donais to replace shred master Rob Caggiano. Donais is a prodigious talent who provides stellar lead lines, an arsenal of extended techniques, and melodic finesse to complement Ian's lead-footed chunk. Donais is younger than the rest of the band, which explains his affinity for '80s metal. "It was so exciting to me back then, because it was on MTV," he says. "Everybody was playing arenas, they were selling millions and millions of records, and it was just over the top. Everything was over the top. I thought it was awesome." But don't hold that against him—his bandmates don't. "It was different times for them," he adds. "I like it all."

Anthrax's newest release, *For All Kings*, is their follow up to 2011's *Worship Music*, which featured the Grammy-nominated song "I'm Alive." The new album is their first to feature Donais on lead guitar. It's also their most thrash-centric release since pioneering the genre back in the '80s. The album was recorded with an array of metal-friendly gear including Ian's new Jackson Custom Shop King V, his signature Randall heads, and Donais' Legator signature reverse headstock Ninja 300-Pro. "I have a bunch of guitars in the studio with me so I can play around with them," Ian says. "But it always comes down to using my top four guitars on a record."

PG caught up with Ian and Donais on tour in Europe to discuss their new album, the recipe for a great guitar solo, how to develop thrash-metal rhythm guitar chops, their new signature gear, and Donais' fear of floating tremolos.

Photo by Jimmy Hubbard

How does it feel having Jon in the band? Do you have good chemistry?
Scott Ian: It feels great. It's been three years already. I think he's passed the audition.

Does Jon only play leads on the album or does he play rhythm parts as well?
Ian: Just solos, harmony parts, melody parts, and whatnot. I am playing all the rhythms.

What constitutes a great guitar solo?
Ian: Something that I'll remember. Something that's as hooky as a chorus of a song—that's all I care about. I've never been into the shredding scene. I'd rather hear Billy Gibbons play one note for two minutes than listen to a guitar-shredding album.

Meaning you want melody and sing-ability?
Ian: Yeah. I want melody. I want feeling. I want soul. I want attitude. All my favorite guitar players—they all have that. It's not about how many notes you're playing. I think that's what so many people have gotten wrong for so many years. And I get it. Some people love that—the technical aspect and the technical ability of super, *super* intense shredding and fast, crazy guitar playing. But I will never be able to play like Paul Gilbert. I understand that, but it's not something I aspire to. I know he's an insane guitar player, but that world never interested me. I like songwriting and I like solos that are a little tiny mini-song inside of a song. Look, AC/DC is my favorite band in the world, so I'm not going to be listening to super technical guitar players.
Jon Donais: I think "Mr. Crowley" is the national anthem of guitar solos. My favorite style of playing is melodic shred. You remember the solo and then there's a quick burst of flashy stuff going on. The best guitar solos are if you can get somebody who doesn't play guitar to air guitar to your solos. I think that's doing a good job.

For the old Anthrax tunes, are you expected to play the solos recorded by Dan Spitz (who was in the band from 1983-1995) or do you come up with your own stuff?
Donais: They just want it close. If it's something really memorable, I don't mess with it at all, but if it's something shreddy, then I throw in my own style where I can. But I don't go too off on anything. If you weren't a guitar player, you wouldn't think, "Oh my God, this isn't the solo." They are memorable solos, so I only start doing that when it's something fast I can get away with.

For the new album, did you compose your own solos and have the freedom to do what you wanted?
Donais: I demoed them out and got them until the guys were all happy with them. When they gave me the A-OK, that's when I went in with it.

Do you play the same solos live every night?
Donais: Yup. All my solos, I write them before. I've always done that. I don't just go in and improvise. I always have it all mapped out and ready to go that way. My favorite solos are always ones you can remember. I like the guys who can shred, but it's memorable and melodic—it's not just a whole bunch of noodling. I like that too, but my favorite solos aren't that.

How about rhythm playing? When did you first start using mostly downstrokes?
Ian: It's a style of playing that just worked in the context of the music we were writing. That's all guitar has ever really been for me: It's a tool to play in a band with other people and it's a tool to write songs with. Anthrax developed from when we started in 1981 and the music we were playing—the songwriting, the ideas, the sounds we heard in our heads, the ideas we had for riffs, that down-picking style and the fast alternating-picking style—that was the way we played. So my guitar playing just developed out of the songs we were writing. I had no style of any type of guitar playing before I was in Anthrax, because I was only playing cover songs. I wasn't writing my own songs until I was in Anthrax. The guitar playing developed around the type of music we were writing.

Did you spend time practicing those techniques?
Ian: When I would be sitting and watching TV, I would pick with my right hand—just play and strengthen my hand to build up stamina and stuff like that. But once we started touring, we were touring so much I didn't really need to sit around and practice. Even before we started touring—I'm talking back in '82-'83, leading up to *Fistful of Metal*—we rehearsed seven nights a week. We were jamming every day, trying to get tighter and tighter and tighter. I was in the rehearsal room jamming and playing whatever songs we had back then over and over and over again, four or five hours a night. There's nothing worse for me than sitting in a room by myself playing guitar. To me that's the most boring thing in the world.

So you didn't sit with a metronome and chunk along?
Ian: No. Never. And there's nothing wrong with that, it's just that it wouldn't have worked for me. I would have been bored and then guitar playing wouldn't have been fun anymore.
Donais: I had all these different exercises that I practiced to a metronome. I used to make sure I would do certain exercises and nothing else. I would do 10 minutes and then move on to something else. Then I would come back and try to bump it up a notch or two.

How important do you think it is for players to work with a metronome?
Donais: I think it's very crucial. If you try to do stuff without the metronome, you can develop bad habits. The metronome helps you become a cleaner, more efficient player. Another thing, too, is it can be encouraging. When you see somebody play at top speed you might be like, "Oh my god, I'm going to give up. There is no way I'll ever do that." But if you have the metronome, then you can slowly increase it. I used to write down the number that I was at—the number I left off at—so I

saw myself getting progressively faster. It was encouraging. It let me know I wasn't wasting my time. I saw the BPMs bumping up and I knew I was getting somewhere. It encouraged me to just keep at it, until I could get to speed.

I read somewhere that you still take lessons and watch instructional videos.
Donais: I haven't taken a lesson in a while, but I'm still always watching things on the internet and learning. When I was learning the techniques, Paul Gilbert was my favorite one to watch. I had all his DVDs—well, it was VHS back then [*laughs*]. But now, you can learn so much going on YouTube. It's just crazy; it's a never-ending thing of learning. You can never conquer the guitar. There is always something out there you can learn. That is what's great about it.

What are your building blocks for solos? In addition to modes, have you experimented with other scales like diminished, augmented, whole tone, and others?
Donais: I've done some diminished stuff, but I don't do too many exotic things. The main modes, pentatonic, and blues stuff is more what I do. Most of my favorite players are guys like Zakk Wylde, Dime [Dimebag Darrell Abbott], Eddie [Van Halen].

Do you just bring your live rig into the studio when recording or do you have a different approach?
Ian: For the last two albums, that's pretty much what I've done. I used my signature Randall heads in combination with one of my old Marshall JCM800s with my TC Electronic Booster/Distortion pedal from back in the '80s in front of it. Between my two Randalls and that old Marshall, we're able to get a really killer combination of frequencies. It covers it all for me. That and miking up a bunch of cabinets, finding the sweet spots, and getting a blend of those three heads.
Donais: I'm not into a lot of gear or anything. I like a simple rig. I go in the front of the speaker like I would live and once I like it, I go with it. It doesn't take long at all.

Do you stand in the room with the amps?



Anthrax's lead guitarist Jon Donais plays his signature model Legator reverse headstock Ninja 300-Pro, outfitted with a pair of Fishman Fluence humbuckers, live and in the studio.

FEARLESS LEADERS
Anthrax's 6-String Top Guns

The lead guitar spot in Anthrax has been a revolving door of incredible talent. Here's an overview of the main players to hold the position.

DAN SPITZ
Dan Spitz wasn't Anthrax's first lead guitarist—that was Greg Walls, followed by Bob Berry—but he was in the band in late 1983 when they signed with Megaforce Records. He appears on every studio album until 1993's *Sound of White Noise*. Spitz left Anthrax in 1995 and spent time learning the Swiss craft of watchmaking. He reunited with Anthrax in 2005 to join their classic lineup reunion and parted ways again in 2007. His older brother, Dave "the Beast" Spitz, was the bass player in an '80s incarnation of Black Sabbath and was in the band when Anthrax opened for them as part of their first arena tour.

PAUL CROOK
Paul Crook was the guitar tech for Dan Spitz before taking over the 6-string slot in Anthrax in 1994. He appears on their two mid-'90s albums, *Stomp 442* and *Volume 8: The Threat Is Real*. Crook has also worked with Sebastian Bach and was in the Queen musical, *We Will Rock You*. He's currently the guitarist for Scott Ian's father-in-law, Meat Loaf.

ROB CAGGIANO
Rob Caggiano was the lead guitarist with Anthrax from 2001–2013, except for the two years when the classic lineup reunited. Caggiano wasn't just a lead guitarist—he also produced the two studio albums recorded when he was in the band, including 2011's *Worship Music*. He's currently the lead guitarist with Danish rockers Volbeat.

JON DONAIS
Jon Donais replaced Rob Caggiano in 2013. Prior to joining Anthrax he was lead guitarist for the Grammy-nominated Shadows Fall.

Photo by Atlas Icons / Chris Schwegler

> “The best guitar solos are if you can get somebody who doesn’t play guitar to air guitar to your solos.” —Jon Donais

Donais: I do both. First I’ll dial it in—in front of the cabinet—and then I’ll go into the control room and usually just EQ it a little bit.
Ian: I’m in the room with the amps for hours. With my head practically in the speakers, listening to every single speaker in the room, listening to every single speaker miked, every single speaker with a different mic on it—really just narrowing it down, going through every possible combination until we felt like we’ve heard everything. Obviously making notes along the way to go back to what we felt was the best combination at the end.

Do you do that song-by-song, section-by-section?
Ian: Hell no. We spend a day or two just getting the tone and then that’s basically the rhythm tone for the record. On this last album I mainly used two different guitars: my new white Jackson—the white V without the Floyd—and my old Gibson ’81 black V. Those were the two main guitars for all the main rhythms. I used the white Jackson on stuff that was more up tempo and fast, because it has a little bit more of a mid edge. I used the Gibson on everything else for the main rhythms. I used some of my other Jacksons—my old Randy Rhoads and some of my newer ones—for overdubbing stuff and harmonies and alternate rhythm parts, just to get a different sound so all the frequencies wouldn’t start canceling each other out. If I’m overdubbing a chordal part, then sometimes maybe we’ll tweak one of the amps, brighten it up a little bit to give a little bit more top to it, or something to make it shine a little bit more, but we keep it real simple.

How much of your tone is the amp and how much is your fingers?
Ian: Well, I have a specific tone. It’s not going to sound like my tone if I’m playing a Telecaster through a Fender Deluxe Reverb. It might sound like my inflections—my inflections in my playing or things like that—but it certainly isn’t going to sound like my tone. If you want my tone, then you need a specific type of amp that has a specific type of gain structure. Of course, with your picking hand, it’s a certain style of playing—being very in control, with the palm muting, and extremely, *extremely* tight and minimal. My

JON DONAIS’ GEAR

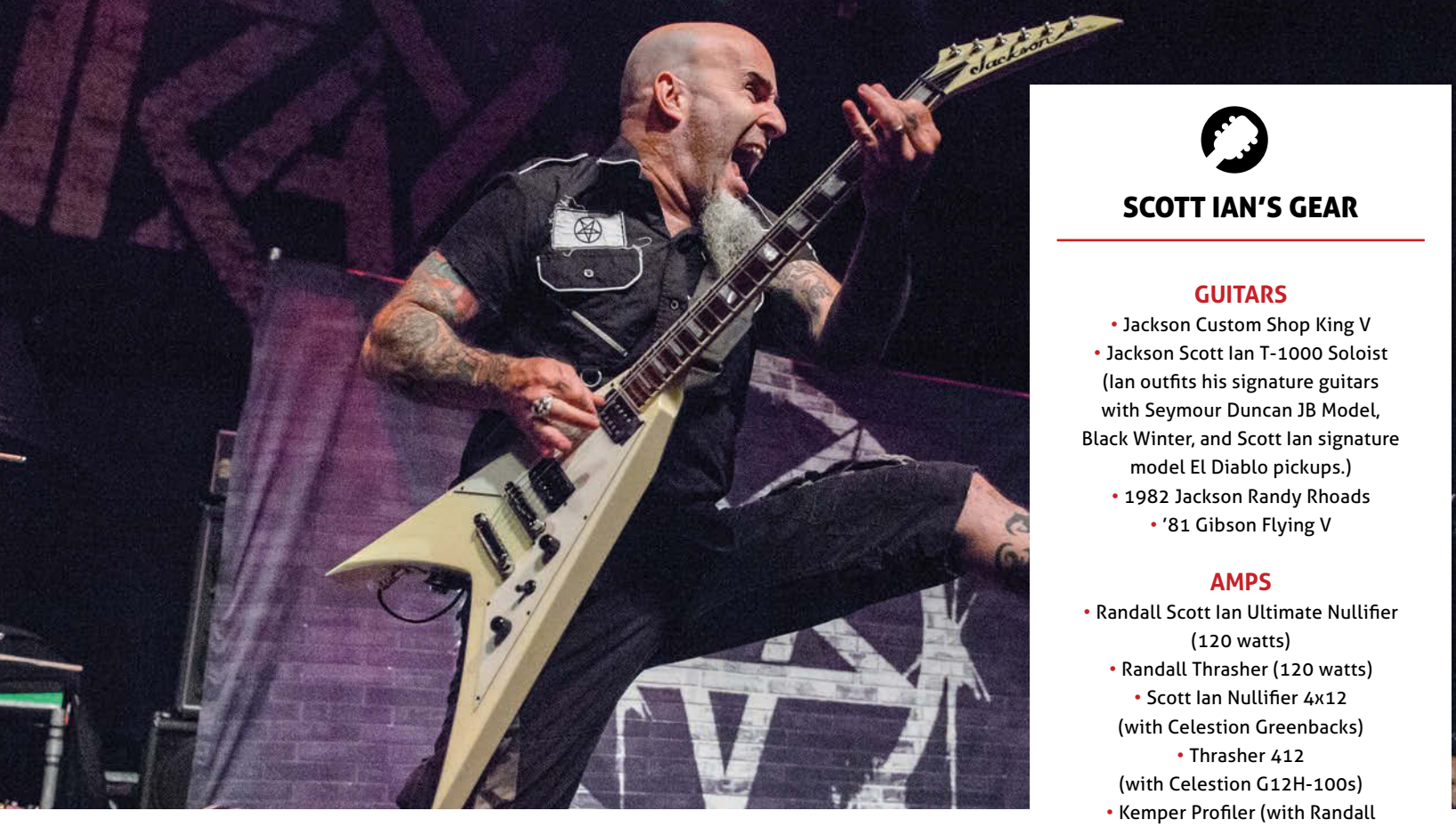
GUITARS
- Legator Jon Donais Signature Ninja Reverse 300-Pro (with Fishman Fluence humbuckers)

AMPS
- Rivera Knucklehead Tre Reverb (120 watts)
- Rivera 4x12 (with Celestion Vintage 30s)

EFFECTS
- Vox V847 Wah
- Maxon OD-9 Overdrive
- CP-9 Pro Plus Compressor
- TC Electronic Spark Booster
- TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb
- MXR M169 Carbon Copy Analog Delay
- Rocktron Hush Super C noise gate

STRINGS, PICKS & ACCESSORIES
- DR Tite-Fit LT-9 (.009–.042)
- Dunlop Tortex .73 mm sharp picks
- Shure ULX-D wireless system





Anthrax's founding guitarist Scott Ian relies on four guitars in the studio: his Jackson signature Custom Shop King V (pictured), his Jackson signature T-1000 soloist, a 1981 Gibson Flying V, and a Jackson Randy Rhoads model.

goal is always a minimal amount of movement and picking.

Back in the '80s, in interviews for guitar magazines, I said my style was "fascist guitar playing"—because there's no room for improvisation, there's no room for anything. When you're playing at speeds like that, it is what it is. It's mathematical. There's X amount of notes that you can fit into a measure and you've got to hit all those notes perfectly, and that's it. There's no room for anything else. Granted, the songwriting style has changed over the years. We're not playing exactly how we used to play in 1987. But still, on the new record I'm playing exactly the same—especially on the thrashy stuff like "Zero Tolerance," "Evil Twin," or "For All Kings."

I also dig in real hard. A lot of guys play lighter than me and there's a time that I play lighter, too, but in general, I'm digging in. If it's not something that's blazing fast, then I play way too heavy with my right hand.

Do you use heavy strings as well?
Ian: I was using really heavy strings for years. Up until last year I was using .012–.060. I got really tired of my hands feeling like chopped meat after shows; it would just tear my hands apart. They're great because I can beat the shit out of them and they barely move—they're like bridge cables—but it was destroying my hands. I was having pain constantly. Going into the studio this time around I experimented with lighter strings, .010–.052. I did it for tone purposes and the .010s sounded better than the heavier strings. There was a better tone, there was more of an edge, and I was like, "Fuck those heavy strings. I'm done with that shit. I'm not tearing my hands up anymore." I just have to be careful when I'm hitting big power chords and open chords because if I hit them too hard then I'm banging strings out of tune.

What effects do you use for your lead tones?
Donais: For my leads I use delay, compressor, and reverb. I really like that big room sound.

What does the compressor do?
Donais: It just helps even everything out—especially with the legato playing. I think it makes it more creamy sounding. It gives it a little bit more bite, too.

Do you use noise gates as well?

SCOTT IAN'S GEAR

GUITARS

- Jackson Custom Shop King V
- Jackson Scott Ian T-1000 Soloist (Ian outfits his signature guitars with Seymour Duncan JB Model, Black Winter, and Scott Ian signature model El Diablo pickups.)
- 1982 Jackson Randy Rhoads
- '81 Gibson Flying V

AMPS

- Randall Scott Ian Ultimate Nullifier (120 watts)
- Randall Thrasher (120 watts)
- Scott Ian Nullifier 4x12 (with Celestion Greenbacks)
- Thrasher 412 (with Celestion G12H-100s)
- Kemper Profiler (with Randall UN120 profile, for fly-out gigs)

EFFECTS

- TC Electronic Booster + Distortion (vintage)
- TC Electronic PolyTune 2 BlackLight Tuner
- TC Electronic Flashback Delay
- TC Electronic Corona Chorus
- TC Electronic Helix Phaser
- TC Electronic Sentry Noise Gate
- Dunlop MC404 Custom Audio Electronics Wah
- DigiTech Whammy
- One Control Chamaeleo Tail Loop MKII switcher
- LoopMaster junction boxes

STRINGS, PICKS, & ACCESSORIES

- D'Addario EXL140 string sets (.010–.052)
- D'Addario custom strings (.011–.014–.020–.036–.048–.059)
- D'Addario .88 mm picks
- Radial JX44 Air Control guitar signal manager
- Shure UR4D wireless receivers
- Shure UA844SWB antenna distribution system
- Monster power conditioner

Photo by Atlas Icons / Chris Schwegler

Donais: Right now I have a [Rocktron] Hush Super C rackmount.

Does it ever kill notes when you're soloing?
Donais: No, because the compressor makes up for that. It gives me more distortion so it doesn't die out. If I were to play just on my rhythm channel, it would. But once the lead channel goes on with the reverb, compressor, and delay, nothing gets cut out.

Scott, a number of readers asked about your new white Jackson Custom Shop King V. Will it be coming to market?
Ian: As far as timeframe goes, that's still something that's TBA—we're figuring all that out—but it's going to be my next signature model. There will be a full-on USA version. There'll be a mid-price of it as well. It's coming, I would assume, either late 2016 or early 2017-ish.

Jon, what guitar are you using these days?
Donais: Right now I'm with a company out of Burbank called Legator. I love those guitars. I've been playing them for almost three years. They're so easy to play. They sound awesome. I like the shape of them—they're real thin. It's light but it still sounds monstrous. I love everything about them.

Do you have a whammy bar on them?
Donais: No, that was never a part of my style. I figured if I don't really use it, why should I have it? Plus, I really got annoyed with changing strings on those things. I have 10 guitars with floating tremolos and they all have one broken string. I just give up. I'm like, "I don't want to spend 20 minutes changing strings."

Jon, what's it like joining a band with such a great history?
Donais: It's just a dream come true. I still look out to the left of me when I'm playing onstage and to see these guys—it's *crazy*. I listened to them and they were a huge influence on my playing. All I can say is it is amazing. I get along with them great. I have a fun time. I love playing their music and I can't complain about anything.





A DIFFERENT ANIMAL

GUITARIST **BRAD SHULTZ** AND BASSIST **DANIEL TICHENOR** ON HOW CAGE THE ELEPHANT MORPHED INTO A SEXTET AND UPPED THE MUSICAL ANTE FOR THEIR LATEST ALBUM, *TELL ME I'M PRETTY*, BY TAKING A TRIP TO THE '60S IN PRODUCER DAN AUERBACH'S WAYBACK MACHINE.

BY JOE BOSSO



Expanding their ranks, plus creative infusion from the Black Key's Dan Auerbach, led these Kentucky-bred pop-rock revivalists to an album that blends '60s signatures and sounds with modernist energy.

"Change" has been an operative word in the habitat of Cage the Elephant in recent years. The biggest development for the Kentucky-based band took place in 2013 when they essentially became a quartet following the departure of guitarist Lincoln Parish, who had been with the group since their formation in 2006. Filling the void left by Parish's exit is former Morning Teleportation guitarist Nick Bockrath, along with keyboardist/guitarist Matthan Minster.

Although Bockrath and Minster are officially "touring members," both contributed to the new album, *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, on which the remaining cofounders of Cage the Elephant—frontman Matt Shultz, his brother Brad Shultz on guitar, bassist Daniel Tichenor, and drummer Jared Champion—swapped their longtime producer, Jay Joyce, for the Black Keys' Dan Auerbach, who recorded the group at his own Easy Eye Sound studio in Nashville.

"It was time to do something a little different," says Brad Shultz. "We've been friends with Dan for a while, so that led to us touring together [in 2104] and eventually making this record. We love sitting around and talking about music with him. We discovered that we share a lot of the same opinions about songwriting and producing, and what makes a great record. Sometimes those conversations can be just like jamming—you're tossing stuff around and jumping on ideas."

"I was surprised at how quickly we moved from track to track with Dan," adds Tichenor. "The chemistry was there, and we knocked out a track a day. We spent probably three months working on our last record [2013's *Melophobia*], and that felt like a really long time. Dan kept us moving along. I think we did the whole thing in a month."

In addition to maintaining a brisk pace in the studio, Auerbach was instrumental in helping the band transform their sound on *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, moving away from the wild and woolly modern rock influences (Pixies, Arctic Monkeys, Nirvana) that won them the "Best New Artist" title in 2011's *Rolling Stone* readers' poll and embracing a smoother, more stylized production aesthetic that borrows heavily from '60s bubblegum radio. The loping melancholy of "Sweetie Little Jean" could easily segue into the Turtles' "Happy Together," and the sparky stomp of "Punchin' Bag" echoes the insistent bite of Paul Revere & the Raiders' "Kicks." Elsewhere, the band conjures up the spirit of late '60s proto-punkers the Seeds on the dark and moody rocker "Cold Cold Cold."

Brad Shultz and Tichenor spoke with *Premier Guitar* about Cage the Elephant's evolving sound, plugging straight into the console, crafting solos, trying out some of Dan Auerbach's instruments, and more.

I understand Lincoln left the band on good terms. How exactly did it happen?

Brad Shultz: He left because he wanted to pursue other things—simple as that. He'd been touring since he was 15 years old, and I just think he wasn't enjoying the road as much as he had in the past. He wanted to stick closer to home, and he found a passion in producing. That's what he wanted to do. You know, that's cool—we understood.

What was the process of getting Nick in the band?

Shultz: Nick had been in several other bands before joining up with us, and one of those was Morning Teleportation. We were just in love with them—like, they were our favorite band in the world. When we went up to New York to mix *Melophobia*, Nick hit us up. We hung out with him, and he came by and listened to some of the mixes. He was loving that record.

We went along our own paths, and then Lincoln was going through some stuff, which led to him wanting to leave the band. We were doing the David Letterman show, which was going to be his last performance with us, and then Nick hit us up again. He was like, "I feel I need some change in my life." He was playing with another band at the time. I think there was something in the timing of it all. Lincoln wanting to leave, Nick hitting us up—it meant something.

Did you have any kind of audition, or did you just know that he'd fit in?

Shultz: We had a feeling he'd be right, but there were a couple of other people we



really loved as guitar players and people. They all came down and jammed with us. You have to feel right about it. There are just certain nuances that have to be there so you can vibe with somebody musically. We jammed with Nick and a few other dudes, but it wasn't like we were doing auditions. It was just more playing and vibing out. It came down to Nick and another dude, and we went with Nick.

Daniel, how involved did you get in the writing and demoing for the new record?

Daniel Tichenor: I'm way involved. The four of us—me, Matt, Brad and Jared—sit around and work on stuff. This time around, we got together at Matt's place and put the songs together. Somebody would walk in with a guitar riff, and we'd get down to building it. Other times, people might have complete songs. But yeah, I'm completely involved in the process.

On your previous album, *Melophobia*, you shut yourselves off from a lot of recorded music to get away from influences. I'm guessing you listened to a lot of music, particularly older bands, when working on this album?

Shultz: Well, see, I think this album is really an extension of



BRAD SHULTZ'S GEAR

GUITARS

- Fender '65 Mustang reissues
- Gretsch G6139T White Falcon Double Cutaway
- Gretsch G5422DC Electromatic 12-string
- Fender Paramount PM-3 acoustic
- Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman (studio)

AMPS

- Fender Twin Reverb combo
- Fender Super-Sonic 60-watt head
- Fender 2x12

EFFECTS

- 2 Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus units
- ZVEX Instant Lo-Fi Junky modulation/chorus/vibrato
- 2 ZVEX Mastotron fuzz pedals
- Pigtronix Tremvelope envelope-modulated tremolo
- JHS The Crayon distortion
- Malekko Heavy Industry Vibrato
- Malekko Heavy Industry Red, Dark, and Lofi Ekko 616 delays
- Boss DD-7 digital delay
- MXR Phase 100
- SubDecay Spring Theory reverb
- Radial J48 Active Direct Box

STRINGS & PICKS

- D'Addario ECG24 Chromes flatwound strings (.011–.050)
- Ernie Ball 12-string Light Nickel Wound strings (.009–.046)
- Ernie Ball Earthwood Light 80/20 bronze acoustic strings (.011–.052)
- Dunlop Tortex .50 mm picks

Left: Surf's up! Guitarist Brad Shultz and his '65 Mustang reissue (which has been beaten so severely onstage that its body is glued together) get a lift during Lollapalooza 2014 in Chicago.

Photo by Chris Kies

the last record and what we've always done. On *Melophobia*, we wanted to step back from our influences, which is sort of impossible because, like it or not, everything that you go through in life influences you in some way or another. We tried to let our own voice speak on *Melophobia*, for better or worse, and this record is the continuation of that in a different way. We're still going forward, even though we're not discarding songs because they sound like they could come from the '60s or whatever. We're not cutting ourselves off to anything.

Tichenor: I'm constantly influenced by music—new stuff, old stuff. I've tried to cut myself off from music, but I don't know … that's not my thing, really. I don't know if it's possible. I think you're always influenced by what you hear or what you've heard.

What kinds of musical ideas jumped out at you from listening to '60s acts?

Shultz: As a guitarist, the whole approach of going direct really appealed to me, and I got that from those bands. A lot of them did the exact same thing—went right into the console. But I think the thing that influenced us the most about those bands was the separation of their tracks. When you sit and really listen to their recordings, you notice how each instrument is doing something very specific. Each part is so thought-out and placed so deliberately. I really drew from that.

When you go direct into the console, do you notice that you actually play differently than when you're going through an amp?

Shultz: Yeah. I think that's probably the appeal of it for me. It feels more human. When I hear that, I really hear the person playing, not so much this amp sound. The strings speak for themselves, almost, if that makes any sense. You can hear the pick actually hitting each individual string as you strum a chord, or you can hear each individual stroke of a lead part.

So that was really appealing to me, maybe because I'm such a raw player. I basically beat the shit out of a guitar. I'm very heavy-handed. I want to hear the separation between each string when I'm strumming a chord. You can hear that on this record, and I really like that. It gives the guitar sound a lot of personality.

Tichenor: Of course, I always go direct. But as far as the guitars, yeah, I think you get a more personal sound by going right into the console. There are not too many effects on the guitars; they're not tweaked around. You get a more raw and honest sound that way.

You both used some of Dan Auerbach's instruments. What brought that about?

Tichenor: Dan definitely wanted us to experiment a bit. I brought a few basses in, but Dan handed me his Mustang bass and was like, "Man, you've just got to use this one. The way it records is so sweet." It had a shorter scale neck than what I was used to, but I figured it out soon enough. I tried it on the first song and thought it sounded amazing, so I stuck with it. I think it made me play a little differently. It made me pull some of those older sounds out a bit easier.





Bassist Daniel Tichenor nails the groove with his Fender American Standard Precision Bass on the Lollapalooza stage in 2014. In the studio, he relied on Auerbach's short-scale Fender Mustang for big sounds.

DANIEL TICHENOR'S GEAR

BASSES

- Fender American Standard P Bass
- Fender Mustang Bass
- Fender Jaguar Bass
- Gretsch White Falcon Bass

AMPS

- Fender Super Bassman 300-watt head
- Fender Bassman 810 Pro Bass cab

EFFECTS

- Fulltone GT-500 distortion/boost
- Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi

STRINGS & PICKS

- Fender Nickel-Plated Steel Taperwound bass strings (.045–.110)
- Dunlop Tortex .88 mm picks

Brad, you used a few of Dan's guitars. Which ones stuck out to you?

Shultz: My favorite guitar of Dan's that I used was an old Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman. Dan was on an episode of *American Pickers*, and the Gretsch he bought on the show is the one I played. It was pretty remarkable, really—just a great feel and sound.

Was it difficult getting used to that guitar? You've been a Mustang player for many years.

Shultz: No, I liked it right off. I think it has a fatter, warmer tone, and that's what some of the songs called for. I did use my '65 Mustang as well. Whatever the song called for is what I played. If we wanted a thin, bright sound, we'd go with my Mustang. If we wanted something a little fatter for some of the more fuzzed-out songs, we would use the Country Gentleman. A few times I used an old Kay. Dan had some of those old Japanese knockoffs. I tried some of those out, and they were pretty cool.

What about effects? Dan has a pretty amazing collection of pedals.

Shultz: I didn't really use any effects, other than maybe a reverb here and there. I have all kinds of crazy pedals, but I wasn't into them for this record. I wanted to see what it would sound like to just strip it all back to either clean or fuzz. If we wanted fuzz, we would just crank the console and make it really hot. Then, obviously, if we wanted a clean sound, we just took it back down and got a great clean direct sound.

There's some gargantuan fuzztone on the song "That's Right." How are you getting that sound?

Shultz: Oh, you know what? That's the only song I used a fuzz pedal on [*laughs*]. Sorry. We did crank up the console to the bone and got fuzzed up, but I also doubled that with a ZVEX Mastotron. Man, that's a really cool, awesome fuzz pedal. I like how it messes up the guitar sound and makes it sound like a horn.

You do a nice little guitar solo in that song. Too little, in fact. I wanted it to go on longer.

Shultz: I think that's the beauty of some of the shorter songs—you're left wanting a little bit more. Then you go back and listen to the track again, and you find different things within the track.

The bass is very dominant on the record, particularly on the song "Cry Baby." It kind of forms the musical bed much like Paul McCartney did on the Beatles' "Come Together."

Tichenor: That Mustang bass creates a big sound. That was new for me, for sure. I definitely try to write melodic bass lines, so maybe they just punch through more. Brad and I like to layer melodies. We like the guitar and bass to marry each other.

Shultz: Daniel is the MVP of the record, in my opinion. The bass lines are just ridiculous. Like I said, what I did on this record was to really strip back a lot of the unnecessary shit that we'd put on some other records. Get rid of the bells and whistles and you're left with that separation between the tracks I talked about, and that allows the bass to really come out because there's room for that. Nothing's getting in the way.

Brad, another great solo is at the end of "Cold Cold Cold." It's totally bruising, but it doesn't sound like a guitar. It sounds like a kazoo. That was all recorded direct?

Shultz: Yeah, but that was Nick, actually. He did that solo. I think he was using a WMD Geiger Counter. That's a fucking ripping fuzz pedal for you.

Do you guys jump ball for who does the solo, or does he just put his hand up and go, "I've got this one?"

Shultz: Honestly, we like the written kind of solo—one that's planned out. So it's not about, "Hey, let's get out there

Photo by Chris Kies

and play." We'll sit around, throw ideas out and shit like that. In the case of "Cold Cold Cold," I think that's probably the best solo on the record.

The lead lines throughout "Portuguese Knife Fight" have a great '60s psychedelic sound. They almost sound like a Coral sitar.

Shultz: What are we doing there [*pauses*]? I don't know. It might just be the double effect of me and Nick playing at the same time. The song was written with just standard chords, and then we peeled it back to each of us playing single notes. It gets a cool effect like that.

Are you guys in the same room together? How does that work with you going direct?

Shultz: Oh, we cut in the same room, the whole band for the full record. Nick used an amp, but I'm going direct. It's cool. I can hear everything with my headphones on. We play like a band.

Do you woodshed before you record an album?

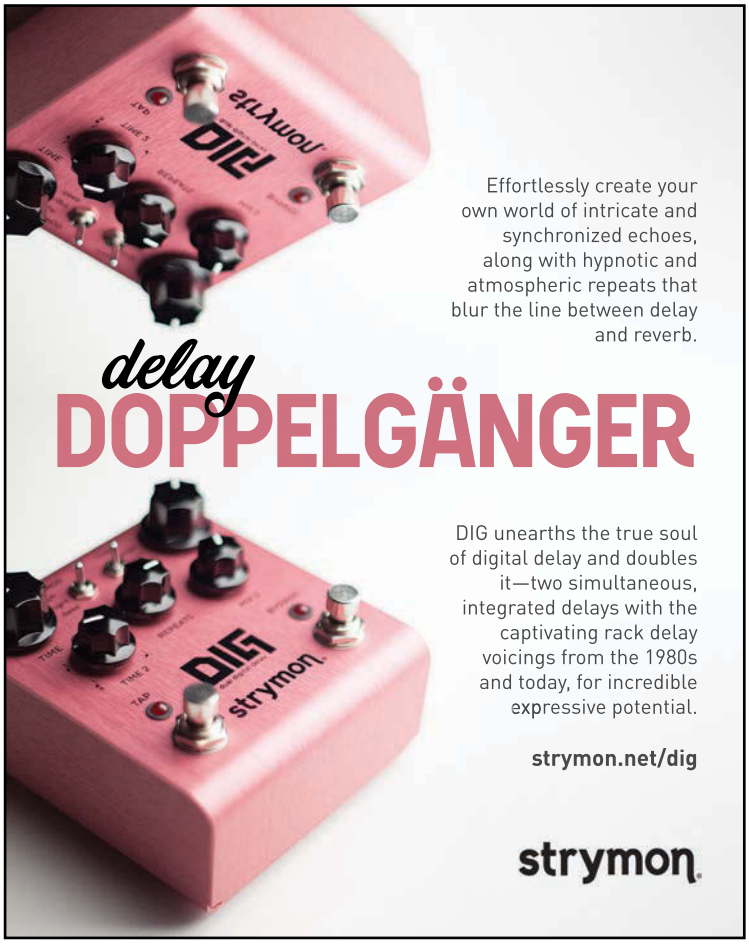
Shultz: [*laughs*] Nah. Honestly, I would like to think if you love music, you're playing music anyway and it's not a practice thing. I spend so much time trying to write songs, so I get my practicing in that way. So no, I don't really practice. I just play.

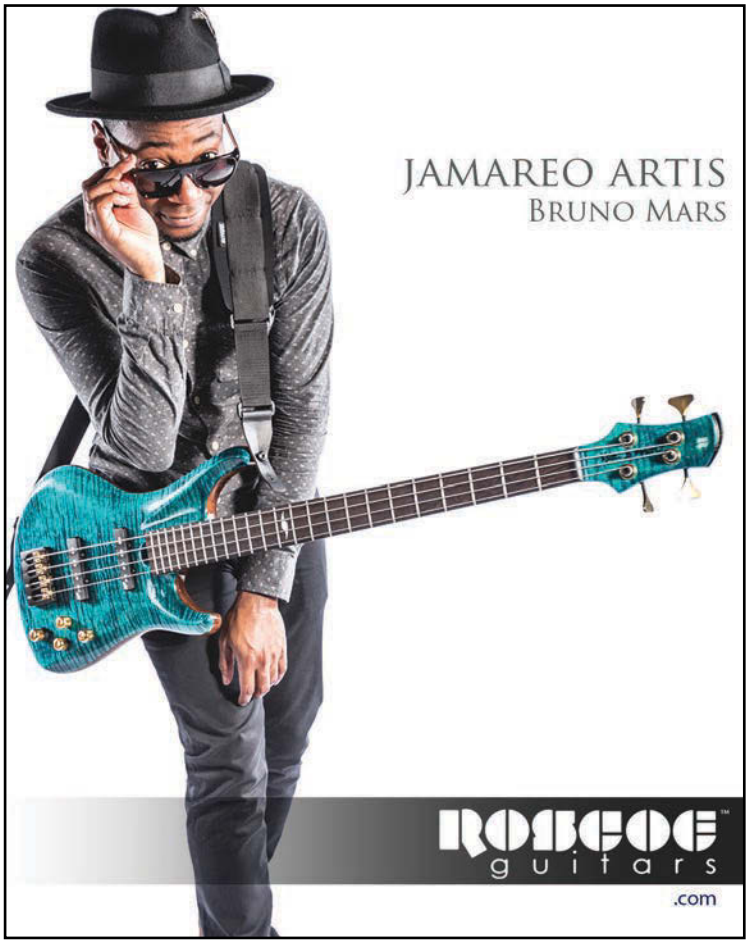
Tichenor: I like the element of surprise. We do like to be prepared before we go into the studio, but you need freshness and spontaneity. You want to be open to new ideas, but if you get too set on things, you might not come up with new stuff. It's a balance. You want to know what you're doing, but you want to be ready for anything.

Is there anything in particular you still want to learn on your instruments?

Tichenor: I started out as a guitarist, so for me, playing the bass is still something I'm learning and getting better at. The bass is a whole different beast from the guitar. One thing that's pretty helpful for me is to study bassists from other bands. I love Paul McCartney. He writes such catchy melodies and bass lines. You listen to him and there's so much to absorb.

Shultz: I think my weakness is technical knowledge. I've always played by ear and I've gotten by pretty well. I can play the guitar, but I don't really know what the fuck I'm actually doing. I've always run away from studying music because I didn't want to mess up my style. When I first started playing, people would ask me how I got my thing down, and I'd say, "I basically taught myself and learned by ear." They'd be like, "Oh, don't ever take any lessons or learn anything. You'll fuck your whole thing up." But recently I feel as though I want to dig a little deeper and get a little knowledgeable about what I'm actually doing. You want to learn enough to take you further, to allow you to facilitate your ideas, but you don't want to lose that part of your personality that makes you unique. We'll see what happens with it.





Little Mods, Big Results

BY MARK DALTON



A guitar hero of mine, the late, great James Alan Shelton, achieved an exceptionally warm, clean tone with his forward right-hand position.

Let's face it. One of the most challenging things about playing acoustic guitar is dealing with the desire to get the tone that's in your head to actually come out of your instrument. We all have guitar heroes and we all no doubt want our playing to sound at least a *little* like theirs. While most of us likely fall quite a bit short technically compared to our heroes, coming closer to a particular tone that grips us is a much easier feat. So this month, I'll discuss some simple things players can adjust or modify to alter the sound coming out of an acoustic instrument.

Hand placement. Almost *nothing* changes the way our guitars sound more than where we place our right hand. Be it fingerstyle or with a flatpick, we can make quite a difference by moving our hand forward towards the soundhole or back towards the bridge. Forward placement results in a warmer tone, while moving back towards the bridge will increase treble response. Changing where we place our hand to achieve the sound we're after, however, can be easier said than done. Most of us who first grabbed a guitar long ago found hand positions we liked and have been doing it the same way since. Overcoming muscle memory can be a challenge, but it can be done! Tip: Unless you're doing so for effect, remember to not lay your hand on the bridge too much or rest your arm too flat on the top, as these placements will dampen the tone quite a bit.

Buzz tolerance is another important component affected by hand placement. When we move our hand up over the hole, we warm our tone, but we also lower the tolerance for buzzing. Think of a rubber band being snapped in the middle versus at one end. When it's snapped from the middle, the movement is much greater than at the end.

This will probably sound extremely elementary, but don't forget that your fretting hand must fret the notes *accurately* to achieve good tone. If we try to play faster than we're capable of, we almost always sacrifice tone in the process (on top of the obvious missed notes)

Hardware matters. If you're not getting the tone in your head out of your guitar, don't be afraid to try something new on your instrument. Things like picks, strings, and saddle and nut materials can make a big difference in your tone. And it's easy enough to swap these things out without breaking the bank.

Here at Huss and Dalton, we have a variety of flatpicks on the setup bench that we've accumulated over the years. When I'm doing setup work, I'll usually try several on each guitar with *wildly* different results. I'm continually amazed at the difference that picks make. So get out to your local guitar shop, grab a handful of varied picks, and run a fun science test when you get home to play.

Strings are the same deal. Your guitar might *like* something other than the strings we would put on at the factory. There are so many choices out there when you consider all the different brands, materials, gauges, etc., and since you need to change your strings regularly anyway, why not?

As for nut and saddle materials, keep in mind that harder is not always better. It seems we tend to want to move up on the hardness scale anytime we plan on changing these things out. If we have Micarta as the stock material, we want bone. If we have bone, we want fossilized ivory. If you're seeking warmth, you probably don't want to go harder on the nut/saddle materials. This type of upgrade *will* help if you lack punch or note separation, but will also tend to add treble response in a way that may or may not be pleasing to your ear.

Personally, when I hear good tone on a guitar, I also tend to like the guitar playing I'm hearing. Whether it's the simple beauty of a player like my late friend James Alan Shelton or the complexity of Tony Rice or James Taylor, my soul is always stirred by the pure nuance of the tones that emanate from their guitars, and then find a place in my head.



MARK DALTON *is a founding partner of Huss & Dalton Guitar Company. When not building guitars, Mark and his wife, Kimberly, tend to the draft horses and mules that inhabit their farm in the Piedmont region of Virginia.*

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Cunning Transposition Tricks

BY JOE GORE

Click here for or audio examples and transcriptions in standard notation and tab.



A simple capo can provide a new perspective on parts. Your cat might like it too.

Last time around we looked at creating sparkling "fairy dust" overdubs with the help of such instruments as standard and octave 12-string guitar, "Nashville high-strung" guitar, mandolin, and ukulele. This month we'll consider another method: just slapping on a capo and accompanying the primary part with chords fingered in other keys.

This technique is easier and more economical than maintaining a menagerie of alternate instruments, and sometimes it just sounds better. When you double a guitar part with a similar instrument—or even the same one—the two tracks are easier to blend thanks to their matching timbres.

Here the parts are near-doubles, but these transposition techniques apply to almost any accompanying part. They might even help you improve a primary part.

CAGED fury. Using the same foundation guitar part as in my previous column, let's evaluate the results as we ascend the neck, mirroring the original part in ever-higher positions. Transposing on the fly like this requires a solid grasp of fretboard theory. Fortunately, we've got a great conceptual tool: the CAGED system, a method of viewing the fretboard as five successive positions.

When I was a teen in the Pleistocene, I learned the five-position concept from my sometime teacher, the great Ted Greene. [To learn more about this extraordinary guitarist, search for "Forgotten Heroes: Ted Greene" at premierguitar.com.] I didn't hear the term "CAGED" till decades later, but I wish I'd known it back then because it's such a great mnemonic device. From the CAGED perspective, each position corresponds to a simple open-position chord: C, A, G, E, and D, in that order. (For more on this concept, check out "The Guitarist's Guide to the CAGED System" on the *PG* website.)

Players usually tackle the CAGED concept to improve their fluency in single-note soloing, but here we'll apply it to fingerpicked open-position chords. All these examples can be played without a capo, assuming you have the hand strength to maintain an index-finger barre while fretting partial chords with your other fingers. Still, a capo might be best for these particular parts, which emphasize chiming open strings.

Oh, say can you C? Conveniently, our primary part is based on an open-position C chord. I started out with a simple unison double (**Ex. 1**). Even though there are no added high notes, the phase shifting between the upper frequencies creates fairy-dust animation.

Like the CAGED lettering says, the next position is A. That means a capo at the 3rd fret (**Ex. 2**), where a fingered A produces a C chord. Here the original melody gets doubled an octave higher—instant fairy dust!

Like all the examples, this one isn't an exact double. It reinforces the main melody, but mud-making low notes are omitted and the arpeggiation varies. The effect is two interlocking but discrete parts, as opposed to the illusion of a single expanded-range instrument that we'd get with precise doubling.

Up the neck. With the capo at the 5th fret (**Ex. 3**), open G corresponds to the original C chord. The result sounds similar to the A-position double, and many notes are identical. Still, you can perceive meaningful differences: This position permits more chiming open strings, and you can feel the guitar's character start to change. The higher we capo, the more we alter the guitar's resonance, and the more the paired parts sound like different instruments.

Advancing to the E position with an 8th-fret capo (**Ex. 4**), the contrast grows stronger. Here you can use the open 1st string as a pedal point. Between the octave-up melody and the ringing high note, it's a double dose of fairy dust. It's starting to sound like some weird zither rather than the same guitar. (This transposition might be my favorite of the bunch.)

Finally we reach the last letter: D, with the capo at the 10th fret (**Ex. 5**). Now the overdub really sounds like a different instrument. Is that differentiation desirable? Duh—it depends on the context!

Your transposition mission. Some art instructors make students draw familiar objects upside-down. Their reasoning: When you consider the familiar from an unfamiliar perspective, you challenge your visual assumptions. You're not thinking about how it's "supposed" to look—you must focus objectively on its actual lines and proportions.

Transposition can work like that. Liberated from muscle-memory autopilot, you can focus on a part's musical essence. You often find that it sounds and feels better in a different position, whether or not you use a capo.

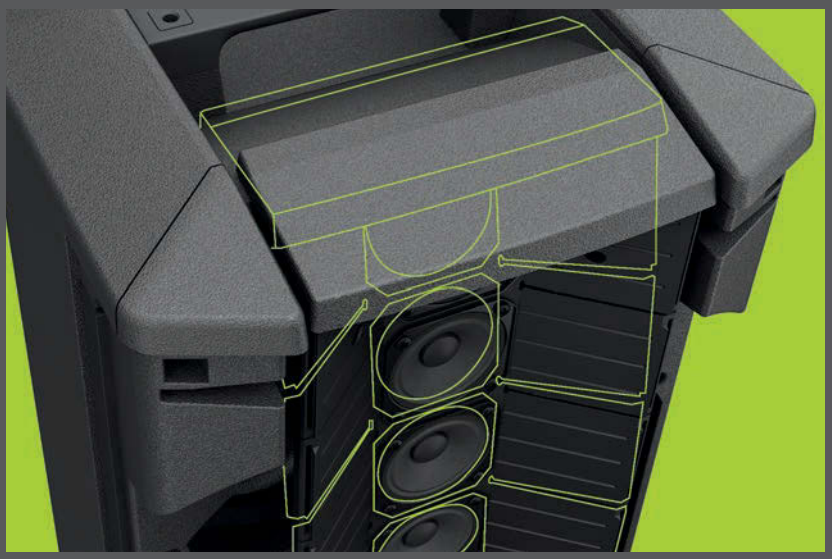
Our examples here are near-doubles that mirror the primary part. But the same principles apply even when crafting an idea to contrast other parts rather than reinforce them. I've found transposition particularly helpful when accompanying singer-songwriters who rely heavily on open-position chords. Try it and see: Next time you're tackling a song in C, consider approaching it via A, G, E, or D.



JOE GORE *has recorded and performed with Tom Waits, PJ Harvey, Tracy Chapman, Courtney Love, Marianne Faithfull, Les Claypool, Flea, DJ Shadow, John Cale, and many other artists. Joe has written thousands of articles about music and helps develop music tools for Apple and other clients. He blogs at tonefiend.com.*

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"Decking" a Stratocaster Trem

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN LEVAN

Having endured for more than half a century—and still going strong—the venerable Stratocaster has delivered great tone to generations of guitarists. One of the instrument's strengths is how easily it can be adjusted to suit different playing techniques and musical styles.

Here's a case in point: Recently a client brought me his 1993 Strat (**Photo 1**) for a setup. His primary concern was that he was having a problem staying in tune, especially when bending one string while holding another. While we were discussing this, he revealed he rarely used the tremolo and kept the bar swung back out of the way when he played. Based on this, I recommended he allow me to lock his tremolo down—or "deck" it against the body. I knew this would resolve many of the tuning issues he was having. He agreed and I proceeded with the relatively simple project described below.

If you're a Strat player who doesn't find much utility in the trem system, you might consider doing this too. This tweak isn't for everyone—many Strat players feel the trem provides much of the guitar's magic. But there are also those who play a Strat because they love its pickups, scale length, weight, and feel, but prefer the stability of having its bridge locked down tight against the body. Some even swear this increases sustain.

Fortunately, it's a reversible mod, so you can try it out and see for yourself. If the tuning advantages outweigh losing whammy capability, great. If you find you miss your trem, you can always return to a floating bridge setup. (I explain that process in "How to Float a Strat Trem," a DIY video on premierguitar.com.

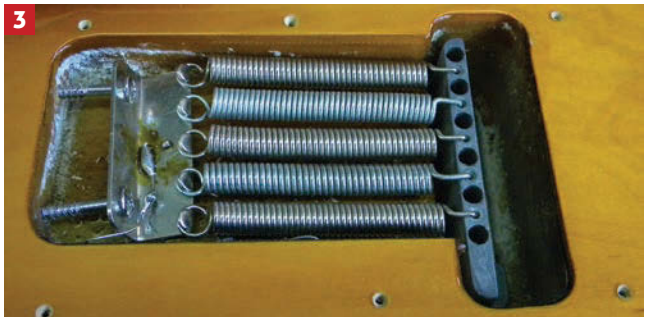
Evaluating the guitar. This Strat had spent some time on the road, but it was in good shape. It had a vintage-style, six-screw bridge—not the two-post design of modern Strats. I noticed there were only two springs holding the tremolo to the claw, which explained why the bridge was tilting forward so much (**Photo 2**).


1


2

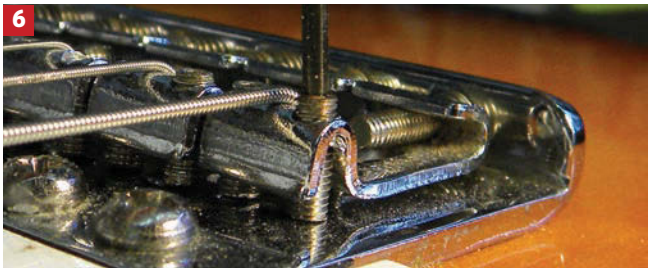
Beware of Stripped Screw Holes

Occasionally when locking down a Strat trem I've encountered worn out screw holes, either at the spring claw or bridge plate. Stripped-out holes must be doweled and re-drilled, otherwise the screws will continue to strip out more wood and will eventually slip out of the hole. Last year I wrote a column about fixing stripped-out holes for pickguard screws, and the same principles apply here, although in this case the holes are bigger and require a slightly larger dowel. Check out "Got a Loose Screw?" at the *PG* website for complete details. Remember, if you don't have the proper tools or knowledge to correctly do this—or any guitar job—play it safe and consult your local guitar tech.


3


4


5


6

It's crucial to know the intended tuning and string gauges before you set up a Strat. My client explained he strings up with .010-.046 sets and tunes to standard pitch (unlike some Strat players who tune down a half-step à la Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan).

Getting started. The first step is to remove the cover plate on the back so you can access the claw and trem springs. To provide maximum stability, I added three more springs to the claw (**Photo 3**) and then used a Phillips screwdriver to move the claw toward the body and tighten the five springs (**Photo 4**). The goal is to tighten the springs enough so the tremolo doesn't move when you bend a string. At this point, we're just roughing in the spring tension—we'll come back and fine-tune it in a moment.

Tip: Remember to tune the guitar after every adjustment. If you neglect to do this, you may have to redo your work. This holds true for every step of a setup, including adjusting a truss rod, setting saddle height, and intonating the strings.

Take it to the bridge! Next, turn the guitar over and make sure the six mounting screws holding the tremolo to the body are all adjusted flush to the bridge plate (**Photo 5**). Don't tighten them too much, otherwise the tremolo will rock forward on its beveled edge. Lower each screw just enough for the bridge plate to sit flat and flush with the body.

Testing one, two. Tune up and test the spring tension by bending the strings. Does the trem move at all? If so, tighten the claw a bit closer to the body. Hold a note on one string and bend another against it. You want the held note to stay in tune as you bend the other string. Keep in mind that some guitar necks flex a bit when you bend a string and this will subtly affect the tuning. In this case, we're only paying attention to the tremolo to see if it rocks forward when bending strings.

Be patient: You may need to tighten the springs several times before the trem stays rock solid when you bend. Remember to always tune after every adjustment. Once the trem is secured flush to the body and doesn't tilt forward when you bend strings, it's time to move to the final setup stage.

Adjust the saddles. Now adjust the action at the bridge saddles. Using an Allen wrench, adjust the two screws to position each saddle to your preferred height (**Photo 6**). Make sure each saddle stays level and doesn't tilt, and adjust the saddles in a gentle arc that matches the fretboard radius. I explain this operation in "How to Set Up a Fender Stratocaster" at premierguitar.com.

Final Setup. After decking the trem and adjusting the action, the strings may be sitting too close to the pickups and this can negatively affect intonation. So we have to check the pickup height before doing anything else. If you want to brush up on this, visit the *PG* website and read "How to Balance Pickups on Strats and Teles."

After adjusting the pickups, then tackle the intonation. Again, I detail this process in "How to Set Up a Fender Stratocaster."

Tip: Always put fresh strings on your guitar before you adjust the intonation.

All right—that's it! You've now locked down your trem and should have a much easier time keeping your guitar in tune.



JOHN LEVAN *has written five guitar repair books, all published by Mel Bay. His bestseller,* Guitar Care, Setup & Maintenance, *is a detailed guide with a forward by Bob Taylor. LeVan welcomes questions about his PG column or books. Drop an email to guitarservices@aol.com.*


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ADDICTED TO NOISE

Ride's ***Andy Bell*** *recounts the early days of shoegaze, his subversive sonic strategies, and the creation of the reunited band's expressionist '90s Brit-rock classics.*

BY ALEX MAIOLO

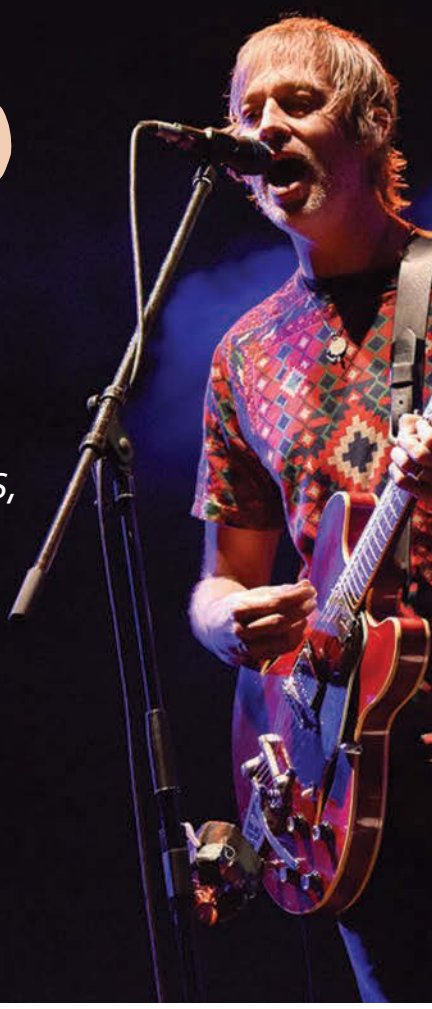


Photo by Kazumichi Kokei

In the late '80s, while much of the U.K. was still raving to the electronic sounds of acid house, a new form of music was gestating in university towns. Inspired by noise groups like My Bloody Valentine, Dinosaur Jr., and Spacemen 3, as well as dreamier bands such as Cocteau Twins, musicians with an artistic bent began to explore what was possible by adding ambient guitar textures to rock.

Rooted in the ego-free punk philosophy that anyone could form a band, and using the back-to-basics instrumentation of guitar, bass, and drums, they married drone and melody to form a new generation's psychedelic music. Their often detached stage presence was blamed on an over-reliance on the effects pedals at their feet or, worse, snobbery—albeit unfairly. The now-defunct British pop-rock newspaper *Melody Maker*, unaware of the paradigm shift that was happening, dubbed it "The Scene That Celebrates Itself" and waved them off as "shoegazers." Few people, even the bands themselves, expected that creative wave to have such an impact decades later, but the DNA of Slowdive, Lush, and the Telescopes can be found in current bands as diverse as A Place To Bury Strangers, Mogwai, Sigur Rós, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, and I Break Horses.

Andy Bell was there at the beginning, when he and some friends from Oxford decided to form Ride in 1988. Like their contemporaries, they incorporated noisy guitars, but their calling card of vocal harmonies and jangly 12-strings set them apart. After a chain of successful albums, things wound down. The band split in 1996 and Bell eventually landed as the bass player in Oasis for a decade.

October 2015 marked the 25th anniversary of Ride's massively influential first full-length, *Nowhere*. Regularly topping "Best of the '90s" and "Most Influential" lists, it's only fitting that the album would be honored with a reissue, complete with a booklet, photos, and liner notes by Bell. Included is a DVD of a performance shot in 1991 at London's Town & Country Club that hasn't seen the light of day until now and shows the band peaking. Last April the reformed Ride played Coachella and set off on a massive world tour, which finished at year's end. We sat down to talk with Bell about the band's history, the gestation of the shoegaze scene, his evolution as a sonic expressionist, and his favorite tools of the noisemaker's trade.



Bell has played his way through the evolution of guitar effects, from stompboxes to rackmount units back to stompboxes, and now performs with two pedalboards filled with boxes.

Was guitar your first instrument?
I'd had a ukulele, but never really got it together with that. I decided I wanted a guitar for my ninth birthday. I was given a basic nylon string classical and put into guitar lessons. I didn't really catch fire with it, and I got bored quickly. Then, somewhere along the way, my uncle Pete got me going with a few chords and taught me some folk songs. Still, I didn't think about it too much until I heard the Smiths on the radio when I was 13, in 1983. I really, really liked the sound of the band, so I went and bought the first cassette of theirs I could find. That's when it all clicked. I was immediately trying to figure out Johnny Marr's guitar parts.

Marr is incredible. That's a pretty difficult first foray into playing guitar.
Yes it was! I was trying to figure out "This Charming Man." Well, I was playing *my* version of it, based on single notes, but that was enough to get me thinking I needed to learn more chords. It was all very organic. I didn't go down the route of learning classical theory or reading sheet music. I still play my E chord wrong to this day. I took some more lessons, but, again, it was frustrating. The instructor would play something and I'd play it back, but he'd say, "You're playing it right, but you're not doing it right because you're not reading it off the music, you're playing by ear." I thought, "If I'm playing it right, why is it not right?" When I look at sheet music I feel musically dyslexic, but I can pick things up by ear easily.

When did you switch over to electric?
I had been playing along with records on the classical guitar. Then friends of my parents gave me a Hohner. It was black, had three pickups, and was covered with loads of switches, like a Jazzmaster. I just played it without an amp for quite awhile. Then I went to a jumble sale in my hometown of Oxford and found this strange valve amp. I think it was homemade. In retrospect, it was probably really dangerous [*laughs*].

When did you get what you considered to be a professional instrument? Something you'd had your eye on?
I played the donated Hohner for quite a while, then got a Satellite, which was a nice 335 copy. I used that for the early Ride stuff, and when we got signed I bought two Rickenbacker 12-strings—a 330 and a 360—and a Gretsch Tennessean, all in one shopping trip on Denmark Street in London. Mark [Gardener, Ride's other singer and guitarist] bought a Fender Jaguar and a Rickenbacker as well. He got the smaller John Lennon-sized one and I got the larger ones like George Harrison and Roger McGuinn used.

Are the Beatles what drew you to the 12-string?
Yes, of course. The Beatles were massive for me, but Johnny Marr played them, too. I always enjoyed Harrison's playing, and Marr was quite similar in some ways—half chords, open strings, different inversions of the same chord, lines where you're not sure if they are rhythm or lead. Sometimes they are both at once! Plus, that almost country style of picking that they both do is fantastic. That was inspirational, so that's how I learned to play. On the acoustic side, I loved Paul Simon. I worked out "Scarborough Fair" and "Anji," which were pretty hard.

That certainly explains the melodic and jangly side of Ride. Where did the noise and aggression come from?
From the bands that were forming and playing around us at the time. We were also into the Who's *My Generation*. I loved the Rolling Stones' *Big Hits (High Tide and Green Grass),* which has "19th Nervous Breakdown" on it. The bass on that track is amazing and noisy. I love that descending riff. I was drawn to those bits in songs. Also, it was the late '80s and all around us, in the air, it seemed, were bands that came a bit before us, like My Bloody Valentine, Spacemen 3, and Loop. They had a noise element that we found really cool. Sonic Youth's [1988] *Daydream Nation* had a huge effect on us. The first songs we had written were very English and soft,

Photo by Piper Ferguson

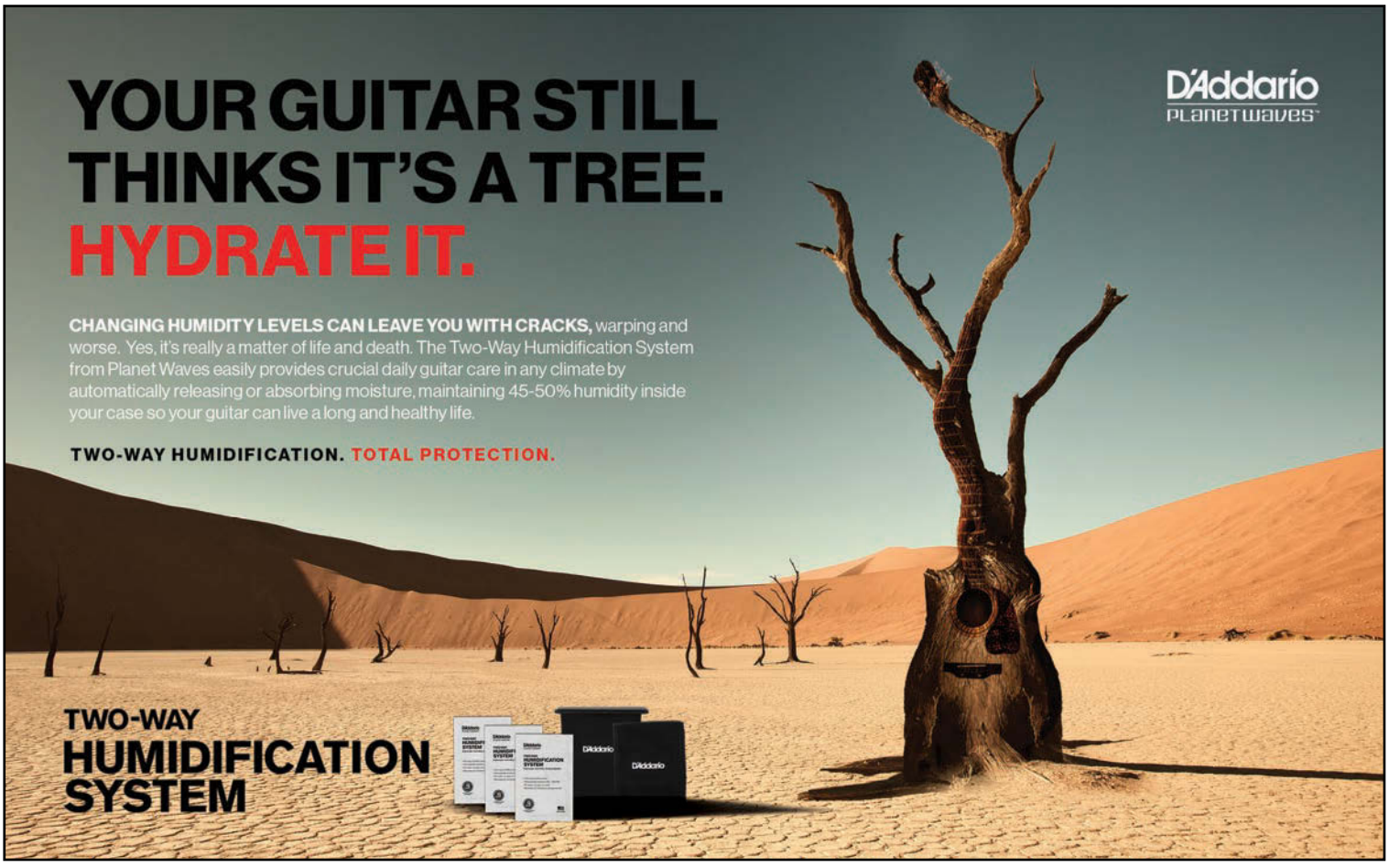
with major chords, like the Smiths or Felt. But when you listen back, you can easily tell when it was we'd heard Sonic Youth, because we immediately started to employ noise techniques. Things start getting more freeform and arty. Songs like "Nowhere" and "Seagull" came out of that. My Bloody Valentine was hugely influential on the bass sound—the overall dreaminess of the guitars, even the drums, and our overall production. We had become addicted to noise.

At that point you weren't in any danger of being signed to Postcard Records?
At our first rehearsal we did play "What Presence" by Orange Juice. [*Editor's Note: Orange Juice was one of the influential '80s U.K. indie pop label's first signings.*] Mark, Steve [Queralt, Ride's bass player], and me had become mates, and then we met Loz [drummer Laurence Colbert] at art school. When we rehearsed at his mum's house we didn't know each other that well, so we had to feel that out a little bit. We also played "I Wanna Be Your Dog" by the Stooges, "Blue Monday" by New Order, and "How Soon Is Now" by the Smiths.

It sounds like the DNA of the band was fully in place at the first practice.
Yeah, but to be clear, when I say "played those songs," of course, I mean "attempted to play those songs" [*laughs*]. Later, tunes we were trying to play became others. "How Soon Is Now" morphed into our song "Drive Blind," for example.

The Stooges seemed big in that scene. Swervedriver mentions them, too.
Swervedriver grew out of Shake Appeal [which is also the title of a Stooges song], and they were the biggest band in Oxford at that time. Everyone was scared of them. They were scary motherfuckers! Through them we learned about the Stooges and became hooked on songs like "1969," and "No Fun." We learned "I Wanna Be Your Dog" because it was the easiest.

It seems to be the "Iron Man" riff of punk rock. You've mentioned that abstract art also influenced the band. Bands like Mission of Burma and Gang of Four say the same thing. How so?
Three of us had been to North Oxfordshire Technical College and School of Art in Banbury. We were filled with ideas of seeing, perception, and deconstruction, so it wasn't a very big leap to apply those theories to music. A great thing about art school is the brilliant reading list. *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger and *The Shock of the New* by Robert Hughes represented the cutting edge of thinking by the late '80s—what art means, and what we do with it. We were all very … *arty* guys, but the ironic thing is the only one of us who hadn't been to art school, Steve, who worked in a record shop, was the one who had the biggest influence on our visuals. He found all of the pictures for the EPs and albums. He had all of these artsy pictures on the walls of his flat and would make our fliers





Nowhere, from 1990, was Ride's debut full-length.

with pictures of people like Nastassja Kinski and Sophia Loren on them. Art and sexy actresses were our stock-in-trade back then. We had the sleeve of *Nowhere* [*a photo of a wave at sea*] before the album was even recorded. We took that picture to the studio when we went to make it.

The Jericho Tavern seemed to be the center of the Oxford music scene. Did you play there?

Yeah, a lot of bands did their first gigs there [including Radiohead and Supergrass]. It's the upstairs of a pub. We only had four songs and we had to fill up the set with something, so we played a song called "Mind Fuck." It was really just what would become the loud part of our song "Drive Blind," only as it's own song, with a slower beat. So we did "Chelsea Girl," "Mind Fuck" for five minutes, then "I Wanna Be Your Dog," and then "Chelsea Girl" ... again [*laughs*]. It was great to play full volume. That in itself was inspirational. We thought, "Let's use this," and developed ideas basing a song on volume and noise, taking advantage of having a P.A.

Did you feel you had an affinity with the other bands in your scene?

We were friends with Slowdive, Lush, and Chapterhouse. I was quite good friends with Blur as well, though they weren't labeled as "shoegaze." In fact, Graham Coxon [of Blur] got me interested in Les Pauls and bending notes more, which had been difficult on 12-string. There's a lot of note bending on a Les Paul later, on [1992's] *Going Blank Again,* in fact. Really, all of the bands respected each other and there was a lack of macho posturing. There's very little rivalry when you're not big. You are all part of the same underground. We knew each other and became mates with some bands who got there a bit earlier, like My Bloody Valentine and Primal Scream. It felt like we were all working for the same cause.

Ride is associated with using effects. Were you using them early on?

I used them back then, but it was quite basic. I had a small Boss multi-effects box with delay, chorus, distortion, and one other thing I can't remember. The biggest thing was when I added a wah pedal, though. When I got that it was like "ahhhhh … oh yeah." I used it all the time, to the point that the other guys were saying, "Andy … you have to ration this thing. Every song can't go 'Wah! Wah! Wah! Wah!'" I still use one all the time, but more like a solo boost now. I've figured out my style with it. I know it's sweep really well, and where the notches are. Sometimes I'll turn it on and just leave it in one position.

When you went into the studio to make *Nowhere*, were you excited about what the studio offered, now that you had figured out your aesthetic?

Our first EP was basically cobbled out of demos, really. The second was done by going into the studio with an idea. We did four songs and we were out of material, so we did a loud jam that was intended for the full album [*Nowhere*], but didn't use it because we decided we didn't want to carry anything over. We wanted to start from scratch with *Nowhere*. We spent more time at the console, taking more control of the songs.

We'd had arguments with the engineer when we made the EPs. The whole thing was a big battle. There was a right way and a wrong way, and in his mind we were doing it the wrong way. By the time we were ready to make *Nowhere*, we'd found Marc Waterman. He had worked in the EMI demoing studio, where we prepared for the album, and was the same age as us. We knew we could work with him. Not only was he not always saying no, he was saying, "Yeah, that's cool, let's do that!" *Nowhere* was his first big break, moving from engineer to producer. The thing is, we pushed him so far that he got a bit worn out, so Alan Moulder [Smashing Pumpkins, Nine Inch Nails] came in to mix it. He went on to produce our next one [*Going Blank Again*]. That record was yet another step up, and we spent even more time in the control room, using things like the Eventide Ultra-Harmonizer on the guitars—especially for lead parts. We used slave tape machines, tried backwards parts, slowing things down and speeding them up, editing two songs together. There were more "studio as an instrument" ideas than on *Nowhere*. While *Nowhere* is more sophisticated than the EPs before it, at its core it's still basically a rehearsal captured.

Reproducing things live must have presented a challenge.

ANDY BELL'S GEAR

GUITARS

- 2 1967 Gibson Trini Lopez models with Bigsby vibratos
- Rickenbacker 360/12
- Rickenbacker 330/12
- 1967 Gibson Hummingbird
- 1966 Fender Jazzmaster

AMPS

- Marshall 2061X 20-watt head
- vintage Marshall 1960A slant front 4x12 cab

EFFECTS

- Boss TU-3 Tuner
- Dunlop BG95 Buddy Guy Cry Baby wah
- Ibanez CP9 Compressor/Limiter (always on)
- Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe compressor
- MXR Micro Amp (usually on)
- Boss DD-3 Digital Delay
- Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Nano reverb (on "Hall" setting)
- Strymon Mobius modulation pedal
- Eventide TimeFactor Delay
- Gollmer '60s Trem
- Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer
- Fulltone Octafuzz
- Eventide Space reverb

STRINGS & PICKS

- Various brands of .010 sets
- Jim Dunlop .73 mm

We had versions of the songs, then demoed them, then made the album. But when it was time to play live, we referred back to the first versions of the songs, before production was added. It wasn't essential to make it exactly like the record. We did a few takes of [*Nowhere*'s] "Seagull" in the studio and one became *the* version—the one on the album—but live it would be different every night. The only time we listened back to the albums as a reference was when we reunited, much later. A song like "Cool Your Boots" [from *Going Blank Again*] had a randomness to it, and we had to learn that randomness. On the current tour we've been able to take advantage of new technology. In the past we could never hear our singing or what we were doing—just the roar of our guitars and drums. Now, with in-ears, we can hear everything crystal clear. It makes us play a lot better than we did before!

Oddly, in some ways pedalboards have become lower tech, with the return to stompboxes.
Yeah, the first time around I was using a Boss DS-1 Distortion, a Cry Baby wah, and a rackmount Roland GP-16 to handle all of the rest of the sounds. Now I use two pedalboards stuffed with stompboxes and no rack gear. My wish finally came true, though, and I have a backwards guitar pedal now. The Eventide TimeFactor makes it so I can do things like play the intro on "Seagull" more like the way we recorded it.

Are there any guitars you used back then that you are using on this tour?
Yeah, both Rickenbacker 12-strings I bought when we got signed. I'm still using the exact ones I recorded "Seagull" and "Vapour Trail" [also from *Nowhere*] with.

Is there anything as a guitarist that you haven't explored, but want to?
Right now I'm building quite a big modular synth setup around my guitar. Snazzy FX in New York City has made me something that allows me to plug in a guitar and use it as a CV controller. It's fun getting to know the modules. The Phonogene from Make Noise is one of my favorites. That's where it's going for me, and I'm so excited about it. I'll be recording and releasing music I make with it.





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AN AMENABLE BEAST

London-based punk rockers ***Savages*** *brought new material and uncompleted songs across the pond for a three-week NYC residency of live club gigs. Guitarist* ***Gemma Thompson*** *shares the journey of interpreting that experience sonically in the studio to create their sophomore album,* Adore Life.

— BY TZVI GLUCKIN —



Photo by Colin Lane

The word "savage" has many meanings. It could refer to an untamed animal, a fierce human with a wild or uncivilized demeanor, or perhaps it could be used to describe something turbulent and unforgiving. The Savages embody all of these things through the bleeding, raw, primal unadulterated power of their loud, in-your-face music.

But extreme volume and guttural riffage are only part of the story. Savages revel in contrasts. At their core, the band feeds off dynamics, drama, melody, and careful songwriting. Their music is challenging, but it isn't difficult listening. And therein lies their appeal—in a touch of irony, they're charged beasts who have civilized things to say about life's finer mysteries and disturbances, through a confrontational approach.

The group's 6-string noisemaster is Gemma Thompson, whose playing is an aural assault—unbridled, uninhibited, and drenched in fuzz and tasteful delays. She layers colors and textures, and flirts with sonic abandon. But she never slips into chaos—at least not unintentionally. Prior to Savages, Thompson was the guitarist for John and Jehn—Savages vocalist Jehnny Beth's duo with (Savages producer) Johnny Hostile—when they decided to change gears. The band's lineup took shape in early 2012 with the addition of drummer Fay Milton and bassist Ayşe Hassan. Thompson and Hassan had worked together before as well, which was helpful. "We've been playing together for about seven years or so," Thompson says of Hassan. "The way I play and the way she plays have always been very much together. It's echoed in how we've learned and how we've grown with our instruments."

When Savages released their first album, *Silence Yourself* (2013), the alternative music world went bananas. The band's ferocity and intense live performances—not to mention the mojo Thompson conjured up via her vintage Duo-Sonic, stompboxes, and assorted amps—landed them spots at myriad festivals and a lengthy world tour.

Post-tour, in early 2015, Savages went to New York for a three-week residency. They brought ideas, riffs, concepts, and song fragments, but no completed material. The music was fleshed out and completed live, in front of intimate audiences at NYC clubs. Savages played their new material each night, reshaped and rehearsed the songs the next day, and then test-drove the reincarnations during the next gig before a different audience. The result is *Adore Life*, their sophomore release featuring a mature yet-still-growing band, tight songwriting, and a varied palette of fat tones and feedback.

Premier Guitar spoke with Thompson about her unusual start as a guitarist, the band's unique songwriting process, her trademark 1966 Fender Duo-Sonic II, the crank-ability of vintage Gibson hollowbodies, effects verses amps, and how you sometimes just need to hold a TV remote control over your pickups.

Thompson prefers vintage gear with a history, and most of hers is from the 1960s. "I feel there's something ingrained in the character of the instrument from that," she says.

When did you start playing the guitar?
I was living in a house full of musicians—instruments everywhere—and I was studying fine arts. My friends were all musicians and I would follow them out, take photographs of them, and paint their backdrops for them. I was trying to make a soundtrack for a performance thing I was working on. I borrowed some instruments and started making noises, basically, until one of my musician friends said, "Please, would you join my band as a noise guitarist?" And I did. I eventually started learning a bit more melody and rhythm, with the noise.

That is an unorthodox introduction to guitar playing.
I didn't exactly start from a technical point of view. I literally would see how much noise I could get out of the instrument. I originally started playing a friend's Strat. I did a lot of dive-bombing with a Big Muff pedal and just tried to make as much noise as feasible.

When did you start learning how to play chords and leads?
I tried to dive right into the more complicated things—like learning Radiohead parts and things like that. I tried to find the hardest things I could find, sit for six hours, and try to learn a very tiny thing. I got pretty good at sitting there for six hours just trying to learn one tiny detail.

One of the first things I really wanted to play was the line from the Birthday Party song, "Happy Birthday." I was trying to learn how to play Rowland S. Howard's guitar line by listening—I think it is in 3/4 or something, very odd little line. I couldn't get the same energy or intensity or the way he was playing it. I realized then that to play like him, you had to go through everything he went through and *be him*. It occurred to me that you have to become your own person to have your own sound, to go through everything to get to that point. That kind of guitar playing you couldn't just mimic and learn; you had to be that person to play it. That inspired me a lot to try and find my own thing. Rowland S. Howard has always been a big hero of mine.



Photo by TIM

IN STEREO

Gemma Thompson uses cool guitars and stompboxes to create her tone, but relies on amps—a Vox AC30 and a Fender Twin—to do most of the heavy lifting.

"I have a Vox AC30 HW2X," she says. "It's the handwired reissue with the Celestion Blue alnico speakers. It's the closest modern Vox AC30 I've found to the original sound of the '60s ones." She would prefer a vintage amp, but touring makes that difficult. "I don't carry spare parts like valves [tubes] and stuff yet, so I have to make sure I'm self-sufficient in terms of my amps working—as much as I would love a vintage Vox AC30 and a vintage Twin Silverface." Her Twin is a new model as well.

Thompson tours with her own amps—she doesn't rely on the dodgy gear clubs might provide. "I'm very particular about the Vox AC30. I've tried a lot of them and experimented with what's the best modern version of the old one. It's gotten to the point where I'm very particular about what speakers are in it." She cranks her Vox to get her tone and usually runs her Twin clean. She runs her amps in stereo and has a custom stereo kill switch for when things get hairy. "I couldn't find a kill switch that had two inputs in and two out that was stereo so I had one built," she says. "I have two amps onstage in stereo with stereo reverb. The switch kills everything dead."

Once her basic sound is intact, she adds a number of pedals to enhance her tone. Her pedalboard is simple, consisting of a few fuzz boxes and delays, with her most basic building block being an MXR Distortion +. "My pedalboard is generally based around the idea of having the MXR Distortion +, a couple of other fuzz pedals, the Boss DD-20, a nice reverb, and then going to stereo amps." She acknowledges the Distortion + isn't everyone's favorite pedal, but it works for her. "I think it reacts very particular to different pickups. It's a very colorful-sounding distortion and I think it's very sensitive to different guitars. You probably either love it or hate it I guess."

"The idea was that instead of writing the new songs and recording straight away, we took these rough new songs and tried to play as many as possible with the intention of writing in front of the audience, with the audience."



Do you write together as a band or do you show up to rehearsal with material you're working on?
It's a very collaborative thing. Jehnny writes all the lyrics and she always has a notebook with her—she's always writing all the time. When we come together to write, we do some instrumental rehearsals where the three of us just play and play and play. I always record everything, every rehearsal. We record everything and we go through it. Sometimes the four of us will be in a room together and we'll be discussing lyrics and the sounds representing the lyrics. On this record, *Adore Life*, we introduced more melody. The vocal melody and the guitar melody—their voices together are very important and very considered. But it's all written very collaboratively—each to their own instruments—but very collaboratively.

So anything could serve as a starting point.
Yeah, that's the thing. I go through each song and think, "This drum idea is a starting point, or this word here with this sound here is the starting point, or Ayşe's bass line here is the whole idea of a song." Take a song like "Surrender," for instance. Ayşe had the idea of the sound on bass—this really mean but beautiful melodic thing—a sustained, fuzz bass sound. She said, "I want to play with this idea." So everything grew around that idea. Or "The Answer." It comes from that guitar riff. You don't know where the drums begin and end—everything is circular and full on.

That riff is righteous.
[*Laughs*] Thanks. It was very interesting. For this record we did a three-week residency in New York in January [2015]. We played nine club shows in three different clubs and we had a rehearsal studio at the same time. The idea was that instead of writing the new songs and recording straight away, we took these rough new songs and tried to play as many as possible with the intention of writing in front of the audience, with the audience. For a lot of the songs, the adrenaline of doing that really finished writing them in a way.

When we first tried playing "The Answer" live as a very rough idea, sonically it was quite tricky to get our heads around. You have to almost *not* rely on the sound. You have to rely on knowing the song physically and mentally. You just watch each other and know the movements, because the sound was very hard in those small clubs to precisely know what was going on. It became a bit of a sonic challenge to work out how we were going to play this intensity live—to know exactly where we were and be very precise.

How do you differentiate between the studio and live?
For the first record we had a mantra that what you play live is exactly what you play for the record. It was very much a document of our live performance.

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GEMMA THOMPSON'S GEAR

GUITARS

- 1966 Fender Duo-Sonic II
- 1963 Fender Jaguar
- 1960 Gibson ES-125

AMPS

- Vox AC30 HW2X with Celestion Blue speakers
- Fender Twin Reverb

EFFECTS

- MXR Distortion +
- MXR Blue Box
- Crowther Audio Hotcake Fuzz
- Maxon OD808 Tube Screamer
- Fulltone OCD
- Strymon Reverb
- Boss DD-20 Giga Delay
- Mini Moog MF Drive
- Mini Moog MF Delay
- Roland RE-20 Space Echo
- Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner

STRINGS & PICKS

- Elixir strings (.011–.049)
- Yellow Dunlop .73 mm picks

Savages guitarist Gemma Thompson plays a 1966 Fender Duo-Sonic II. "It's a very simple guitar, but you can throw it around—you can do anything to it—and it's very light. I know exactly when it's going to start feeding back, at what point, what exact sound, and it's a very intuitive instrument."

But for this record we had a lot more freedom. We went to RAK Studios in West London and we had about three-and-a-half weeks in there. It was a very comfortable, very nice studio. Fay had plenty of time on drums, Ayşe had plenty of time on bass, and I had a whole week for the guitar.

I guess that's always the question: How do you get that same energy into the recording as you do live? Because we found the sounds and had, in effect, written the songs and finished them off live, I think recreating that was a little bit easier in the studio. It was very fun. I had all sorts of vintage Fender Vibrolux amps and Vox AC30s from the '60s all hooked up, and I was playing with a Fender Jag and the Duo-Sonic. It was just a great time for exploration there.

Tell us about your main guitar, a 1966 Fender Duo-Sonic II.

The guitar fell onto me, if that makes sense. It just happened to become my guitar. I didn't specifically choose a Duo-Sonic. It's a very simple guitar, but you can throw it around—you can do anything to it—and it's very light. I know exactly when it's going to start feeding back, at what point, what exact sound, and it's a very intuitive instrument. The record was recorded half with that guitar, half with a hired Jaguar, and a bit with a Gibson hollowbody.

A Gibson hollowbody? I didn't expect that.

It was a Gibson ES-125 from 1960. It created some really beautiful low-end feedback, which was interesting. An MXR Blue Box on that instrument was quite an interesting sound.

That's a very different instrument from your Duo-Sonic.

It is. It's not one that I could easily translate to the Savages live show. It's the opposite of the Duo-Sonic.

You use a lot of vintage gear. What do you like about it?

I like to know the instrument has character. I find that really important—that it's got a history. I feel there's something ingrained in the character of the instrument from that.

Meaning that each instrument has a personality?

I always think that. There's a beautiful clip on YouTube of Leonard Cohen. [*Ed. note: Cohen was honored with a "Princess of Asturias" award by Spain in 2011 and traveled there to accept the award.*] In his speech, he thanked Spain for the trees and the wood that created his flamenco guitar. That idea is so beautiful. He goes to a country and thanks the wood that created his instrument because that's the sound that comes through everything.

I like to think about the wood, where it's from, and who has had it. The guitar is such a great instrument in that you can play

Photo by TIM

all of it in any way. It's all stereophonic. And this idea that it's come from the trees and from the earth—it's kind of a silly thing but also really grounding in a way. It's really a kind of primal thing.

Talk about your approach to pedals.
I try not to use too much in terms of effects. Obviously, I use quite a bit of distortion, reverb, and delay, but I'm always trying to focus more on the manipulation of the guitar and the amp. The pedals are just a tool to manipulate that a bit more. I try to see it like that rather than what effects I can put on to make a sound.

Effects do change the way you play, but you're saying you use them to enhance your basic sound. You're not just pressing buttons to see what happens?
No. I mean, I do all sorts of experimenting with different things. But I think finding the right guitar, the right way to play that guitar, and the right amp should be most of the work, really. The effects are just a way to work that way of playing. Obviously, from speaking with other musicians—guitarists I really admire—or seeing what other people do, the best thing I've learned is that you experiment and you make your own way to do things. There is no right or wrong in what you're doing; you should just do whatever suits you.

You don't use loops, but for a few of the songs on the album, like "I Need Something New," "When in Love," and "Mechanics," are you just using delays to create those layers?
Yeah, that's right. In "Mechanics" I have a loop of a drone sound that I'm layering up. But in terms of loops in Savages, I try not to do that. I'm a real believer in just playing what you need to play right there. I use the [Boss] DD-20 delay and that kind of sound-on-sound process, and I use the [Roland] Space Echo as well for tap-tempo delays and stuff. But I don't really use loops.

Do you find it difficult to recreate those sounds every night live? Do you keep it loose?
No, I manage to recreate everything, although it's nice to experiment. If you're feeling it, go a little bit further. I recently bought the Jag. I'm enjoying having the whammy bar to play with. I'm still working out the different sounds on that instrument. It's just a lot of fun. But there's always room for more manipulation.

On "When in Love," I couldn't tell if that was slide or feedback.
I think there is slide on that. It got to the point in certain parts of the songs where I was making cascades of noise and I had a chair full of tools just to manipulate the guitar. I probably threw a bit of that on there.

Did you have any other cool tools?
I had things like pliers and whatnot. A TV remote control is sometimes interesting. You can get very strange sounds from that.



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The Song Guys, Part 2

BY VICTOR BRODÉN



Garry Tallent, longtime provider of the low end for Bruce Springsteen, draws on a bank of varied influences for his unique and dynamic style.

In a previous column, I wrote about a few incredible players who might not be on everyone's list for their next song-learning session ["The Song Guys," September 2014]. Due to the simple nature of the instrument, the world of bass guitar has a large number of unsung heroes who keep their heads down and support bands with all of their might. This is why I feel it's high time for another set of these guys to get their moment in the sun. Like any true artists, these bassists all have a specific set of tools in their playing that separates them from the pack, and that's why you absolutely *need* to be aware of them.

Garry Tallent, E Street Band. When I was 12 years old, my first bass hero was Garry Tallent, the original bassist behind Bruce Springsteen. He still plays with the Boss to this day. Tallent is clearly influenced by the bounce of Motown bass lines and the swagger and attack of some of the great rockabilly and surf-guitar players. He incorporates the attitude of those players by doing half-step hammer-ons in the lower register, thereby dirtying up the sound and making the whole band sound looser. Tallent achieves a similar effect by using the higher register on the lower strings to create a woofy sound. (Check out the chorus of "Cadillac Ranch" for this effect, when he slides octaves up on one string.)

The strong groove of "Downbound Train" blew my mind when I first heard it, and the bounce and direction of Tallent's line gets me to this day. Still, his *pièce de résistance* for me is "The Ties That Bind," a simple rock song that gets a furiously energetic bass treatment.

Peter Baltes, Accept. After talking about Cliff Williams of AC/DC in the first installment of "The Song Guys," it's a natural progression to mention Accept's Peter Baltes, who is equally unselfish in his delivery of root-note thunder. Accept's sound is classic heavy metal and features heavy guitar riffs over mostly straight-ahead, eighth-note-driven bass. Baltes is different from many metal bassists because of his clean, Precision-inspired tone with a modern, clear high end that is never shrill and never distorts. As a result of his tone, the amount of attack from the bass is astounding on most Accept records. For a prime example, check out the bass break 40 seconds into "Teutonic Terror." When the bass gets a moment to shine without guitars, his parts are very heavy sounding, even when they aren't played with full attack. The band's biggest hit, "Balls to the Wall," has a bass hook in the breakdown that sounds menacing without being too aggressive. For hard rock, I often come back to his playing for inspiration.

Nick Seymour, Crowded House. A player on the very opposite end of the spectrum from Peter Baltes is Nick Seymour. Seymour uses his bass as a paintbrush to add accents to music and to comment on an already existing canvas from the rhythm guitar and drums. This type of playing *can* occasionally feel somewhat noncommittal to listeners and players like myself, who normally prefer the bass to be the backbone of the music, but Seymour successfully avoids that trap by being constantly interesting. Between warm, upper-register fills in interesting places and McCartney-esque melodies in the lower register, the experience of listening to the bass almost becomes the same as listening to a very creative rhythm guitarist.

There is a subtle, old-school funkiness to Seymour's playing that can be heard on songs like "World Where You Live." The band's hit, "Don't Dream It's Over," has a beautiful flowing bass pattern in the verses that pops out over the traditional bass drum pattern with subtle syncopation and octave skips. And the fill that starts the song catches the listener completely off guard. Brilliant!

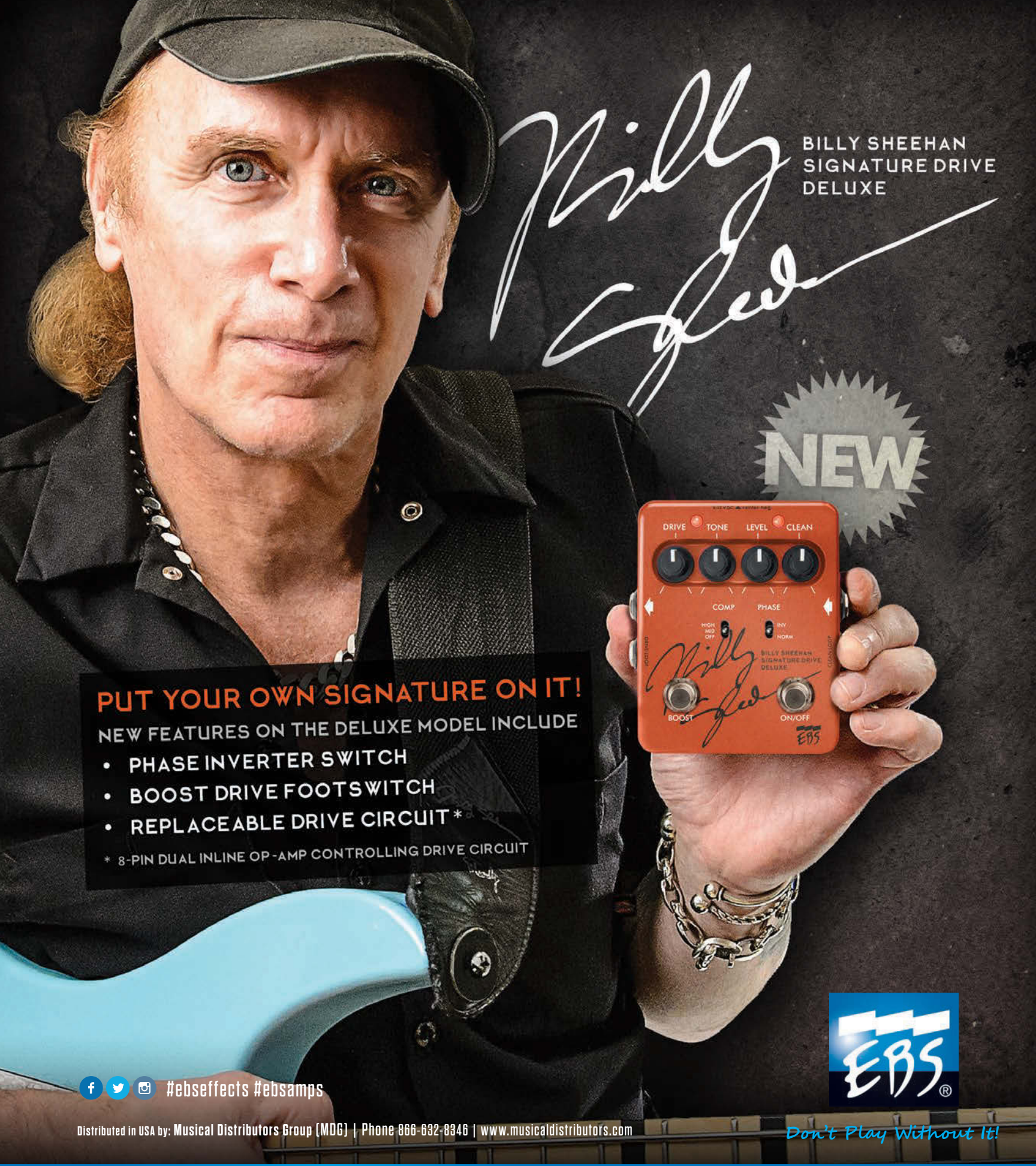
Joe Chemay, session great. Before I moved to Nashville in January 2000, I had already spent the previous few years being tremendously inspired by what had come out of Nashville in the mid-to-late '90s. "Pop country" at the time was still country, but filled with beautiful pop melodies reminiscent of the slick pop being made in Los Angles in the late '80s. Most of this Nashville goodness was happening on the albums released by females, and some of the session musicians playing on those records were recent transplants from L.A. This was the case with Joe Chemay, who had enjoyed a great career in L.A. as a session bassist, world-class harmony singer, and arranger.

I first discovered Chemay on the song "Safe in the Arms of Love" by Martina McBride. Chemay played the song with a pick, and the roar of the fretboard wood is *very* present in the mix—on a *country* record! Joe plays aggressively and melodically, and achieves a yin and yang effect between the beautiful melodies and the very grind-y tone that I love. That approach has given me the confidence to really dig in on some sessions where the rest of the band maybe isn't delivering quite as aggressively. As if the bright pick playing wasn't enough on that same up-tempo, eighth-note-driven song, Chemay overdubs a fretless on top of the picked bass, making big sweeping movements like a cello player.

These guys might not have numerous feature stories written about them, but check them out and I promise you'll be inspired.

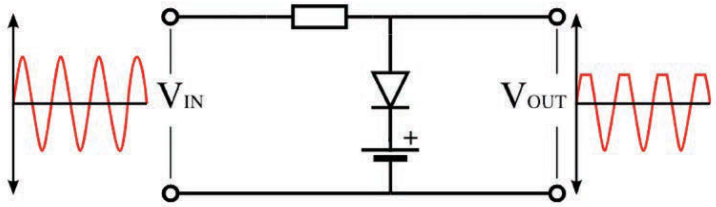


VICTOR BRODÉN *is a Nashville bassist and producer who has toured and recorded with more than 25 major-label artists, including LeAnn Rimes, Richard Marx, Casting Crowns, and Randy Houser. You can reach him at vbroden@yahoo.com.*


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Passive Distortion

BY HEIKO HOEPFINGER



The asymmetric, single-sided clipper circuit and its effect on the waveform.

Now that we've spent several columns exploring the pros and cons of various passive tone control systems and wiring schemes, let's plunge into a subject that doesn't seem like it could be a battery-free effect: distortion.

Before you start throwing away batteries, don't expect this to be the loud distortion you're used to getting from active, powered pedals. No esoteric tricks or advertising hype will get us past the laws of energy conservation. That said, it's possible to generate distortion without active circuitry.

Up to now, we've used only simple resistors and capacitors for all the passive circuits we've explored, and we've seen how quickly the details can get complicated. In this case the wiring is pretty simple, but the element itself—a diode—and its behavior is a bit more complex. Fortunately, we don't need to dig too deep to understand the basics.

The diode is another passive element that's often compared to a mechanical valve. It lets all current pass in a "forward direction" and blocks it the opposite way. This is why diodes are most often used to transform alternating current to direct current—something we're definitely not looking to do here. The effect used to distort a signal is called *signal clipping* or *diode clipping*.

With the above information, wiring a circuit as shown in **Fig. 1** doesn't look like a good idea, as the whole thing appears to resemble a perfect short circuit. In reality, it's the forward bias or voltage drop that saves our signal ... or at least part of it.

Depending on the materials used in the circuit and how it's constructed, a diode needs a specific voltage before it shunts the exceeding voltage/current to ground. Again, this is much like a valve that needs an initial force to overcome internal pressure before it opens up.

Once the signal exceeds this voltage, it cuts off the peaks of our sinusoidal primary signal and alters the waveform as seen in our diagram. To our ears, the resulting crippled waveform is what sounds like distortion.

Distorted or not, cutting peaks isn't very likely to make the final sound any louder, and it actually feels a bit weird to add distortion with diode clipping and get a less powerful signal.

What yields the distortion on our amps is a powerful amplified signal that starts to distort once it reaches a certain limit. With a diode and the weak signal from passive pickups, we need to select a diode type or material with a forward bias that lies below the output voltage of the pickups. While a higher bias only cuts off small parts of the peaks, lower values result in a bigger cut-off and higher distortion—and also a weaker output signal.

Additionally, there are two basic variants of clipping circuits: asymmetrical and symmetrical. The single-sided asymmetrical cuts just one of the two peaks, while the double-sided symmetrically cuts both sides via two opposed diodes. And just to make it complete, a third variation could be an asymmetric double-sided clipper using different diodes and forward voltages.

With a wiring as simple as this, the difficulty is—once again—finding the right parts. As with many of the tone control circuits we've discussed previously, the parts are cheap but the sheer number of different available options makes it hard to decide which one will work best. Pickup voltages rarely exceed 0.5V, so most of the silicon diodes available with their 0.7V bias wouldn't alter our signal at all. Germanium types around 0.3V should work, at least when combined with a decently powerful pickup. Another solution is to use silicon-based Schottky or "hot-carrier" diodes, which are well known for their low forward voltage.

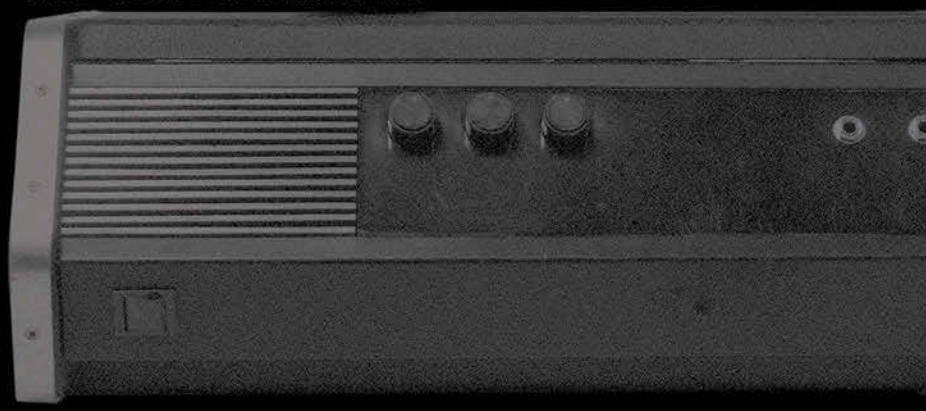
We also need to consider commercially available products like Black Ice, which the manufacturer describes as a battery-free, onboard overdrive that offers different degrees of distortion depending on how you wire it into your instrument.

How does diode clipping sound? Again, don't expect this circuit to replace any fuzz or distortion pedal! Distorted or not, cutting peaks isn't very likely to make the final sound any louder, and it actually feels a bit weird to add distortion with diode clipping and get a less powerful signal. Thanks to our psychoacoustic perception, the added crunch partially compensates for this, but it's not like the warm distortion of a glowing tube, and the overall tone gets muddy, dark, and mellow, which is why many players recommend pairing a diode-clipping circuit with single-coils.



HEIKO HOEPFINGER *is a German physicist and long-time bassist, classical guitarist, and motorcycle enthusiast. His work on fuel cells for the European orbital glider Hermes led him to form BassLab (basslab.de)—a manufacturer of monocoque guitars and basses.*

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The Noise of Art

BY BENJAMIN HINZ

"Oh, the noise. Oh, the noise, noise, noise, noise." That word isn't just a plague on the Grinch, my friends. It's a plague on *me*. And since they asked me to write a column, you're going to read about my feelings. I want to start with noise's B-side: music.

Music (noun): Vocal or instrumental sounds combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion.

Or: The science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity.

Let's put on our open-minded hats here and consider what that means. I would argue that anything can be music. "No, sir. Some of it is noise," you say. I'll humor you for a second, but let's refer to the dictionary again.

Noise (noun): A sound, especially one that is loud or unpleasant, or that causes disturbance.

Or: Irregular fluctuations that accompany a transmitted electrical signal, but are not part of it and tend to obscure it.

These two definitions are pretty clearly subjective. Noise can be music and vice versa. Music is a personal experience. That subjectivity is the root of the problem with calling things "noise." The concept of noise as art, as an expression of something we all feel sometimes, is important. It reminds me of something Brian Eno wrote: "Whatever you now find weird, ugly, uncomfortable, and nasty about a new medium will surely become its signature. CD distortion, the jitteriness of digital video, the crap sound of 8-bit—all of these will be cherished and emulated as soon as they can be avoided."

Eno makes a pretty bold statement, but one can extrapolate the concept out to guitar distortion. Overdrive is literally the sound of a machine that can't keep up with demand, and fuzz started as a malfunctioning preamp that was soon adapted into a dedicated effects pedal.

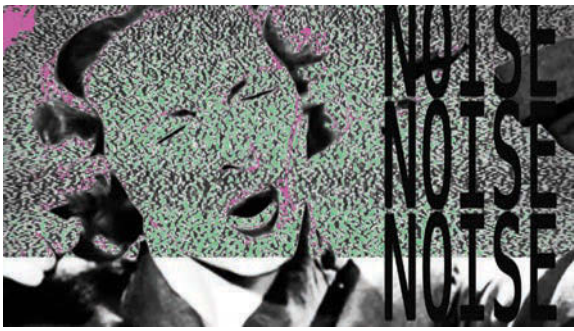
In a pretty short time, what was "noise" associated with electric guitars became part of the form. Consider the most obvious example: Jimi Hendrix, who kicked off his 1967 album, *Axis: Bold as Love*, with a piece called "EXP" that was jam-packed with feedback and other "extended techniques." Do I even need to bring up his rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner?"

What "noise" means in American culture is pretty close to the dictionary definition, and we can trim it down further to "sounds you don't like." But if you're willing to accept the dedicated experimentalist Hendrix as musical, then I think it's fair to entertain the idea that noise, in general, can be musical. A better definition of noise, to me, is unintended or unwanted sound.

What about a field recording of the "noise" in a busy city? The chaos of nature? The symphony of humanity? If some random person was standing next to my recording rig, being bothered by the grumbles of traffic and far-off sirens, that person may hear noise, but I might be capturing music. It's all about intention, friends.

If you accidentally stumble onto, let's say, a YouTube video of a product that makes sounds you don't like, is that noise? The sound is unwanted, for sure. It might even be unintended. After all, who among us hasn't had their computer open up videos without our consent? Yep. *Noise*!

On the internet, of course, if you find a gear demo offensively noisy there is only one rational response, and that response is to leave a snark in the comments section. I mean, come on. You've had a rough day and now the internet brings you this noise?!?! Your anger is a gift and you're going to share it with the rest of the world, or at least the product's creator and the others who watch the video. This may or may not have happened to us.



What I'm getting at here is the relativity of noise versus music. Truth be told, I still get a little riled up when "noise" is used as a dirty word, because usually it means "I don't like what you're doing." The connotation is that "noise" is less than music—less than a knock-off of the Chipmunks doing public domain songs on a flexi-disc that comes in an oversized birthday card. And less than the endless stream of sub-bass drops in the trailer for *The 5th Wave*.

Since those of us who get "noise" thrown at us don't have a lot of hope for changing the rest of the world, we can only change how we react. I try to have a little editor in my head that adds lines. For example, "That's just noise!" translates to "I don't like what you're doing." And then the In-Headitor adds any of the following:

"And that's OK."
"But I don't use pedals."
"But I do like to eat kittens."

And then I feel better. I would recommend an In-Headitor to anyone.

What I'm saying is: Don't yuck someone else's yum. The effects world is huge and messy and evolving. There really is something for everyone. Just keep the chorus pedals away from me.



BENJAMIN HINZ *is the Supreme Commander at Dwarfcraft Devices and Devi Ever FX. In addition to experimenting with audio, he really enjoys* Blade Runner *and Tom Petty's* Wildflowers.

Illustration by Benjamin Hinz



THE RESURRECTION OF THE LEGENDARY BINSON ECHOREC MULTI-HEAD DRUM ECHO.



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Decoding Modern MIDI Guitar

Discover how new technologies make it easier than ever to access electronic sounds from your fretboard.

BY AVI BORTNICK

I confess: I don't like MIDI guitar. Or I didn't. I guess what I don't actually like is the accepted notion of MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) guitar, which is to turn our beloved 6-string into a controller to trigger cheesy synth sounds like pan flute, digital piano, or sampled sax. When you factor in tracking delays (the lag time between plucking a note on a guitar string and when a synth sound actually comes out of a speaker), note misfires, extra cables, special pickups, interfaces, extra floor pedals, and patching into a PA, the sonic promise of MIDI guitar seems musically questionable. In the past, I figured this technology was best left to YouTube noodle-nerds.

But on the other hand, I like effects. I like new sounds. I like trying to push sonic limits, especially since I get bored with stock guitar pretty easily. And though I can kind of get around on the keyboard, I have much greater facility on the guitar. So for sequencing or software-based notation, being able to just play guitar rather than hunt and peck on a keyboard would sure be nice.

After 30 years of MIDI guitar development, most guitarists now stay clear of using the guitar as a controller. Sure, MIDI is commonly used on floor controllers to change patches on multi-effect units or true-bypass pedal loopers, but this is different from using the guitar itself to play a synthesizer or control effect parameters.

We live in an incredible age of music software and synthesis, so it seems well worth taking a fresh look at MIDI guitar, especially in light of new ways to convert guitar notes to MIDI signals. And imagine the rewards if you *could* make MIDI work: You'd be able to tap into the vast galaxy of software synths and plug-in effects, create unique sounds, and input MIDI signals into sequencing software with ease. Rather than getting frustrated by the inherent quirks of using guitar as a MIDI controller, perhaps one can have a more Zen-like attitude. In this article, we'll explore a bit of guitar synth history, the current state of MIDI guitar, and ways to take advantage of MIDI while minimizing the guitar-specific pitfalls.

A Brief History of Guitar Synthesizers

The early '70s saw the introduction of guitar "synthesizers," which were really analog effect units that created synth-like tones from a guitar pickup's output while preserving the sound of a normal electric guitar. While these systems occasionally found users, few guitarists adopted them. They were expensive, unwieldy, and sonically limited or disappointing — especially when compared to a keyboard.

True guitar synths started to appear in the late '70s. Rather than merely processing a guitar signal, these systems analyzed the pitches played on a guitar and then used the resulting information to control synthesizer circuitry. Roland developed a system that was widely adopted. They started with the GS500, followed by improved versions in the form of the GR300 and associated compatible guitars (G303 and G808). These guitar synths were polyphonic, had musically viable sounds, and delivered tracking speed and accuracy that some say has yet to be eclipsed.

By the mid ’80s, MIDI had become established as a way of sending note on/off signals and other musical information from one device to another. Now there was a standardized way to control one synthesizer from a MIDI-compatible keyboard, or, as interest to us here, from a guitar equipped with a hexaphonic pickup and a pitch-to-MIDI conversion system. Roland, Ibanez, Charvel, and a host of other manufacturers offered pitch-to-MIDI conversion systems, with Roland’s GK hexaphonic pickups becoming the standard with their 24-pin (and later 13-pin) connection systems. In 1988, Casio introduced the MG-510 a Strat-style guitar with a built-in hexaphonic pickup, converter, and synth sounds.

Compared to the early Roland guitar synths, these MIDI-based guitar synths had latency issues—the time it takes between when a note is first plucked to when a synth sound is emitted. (For a detailed look at how I measure latency, read this article at premierguitar.com.) While keyboards have the advantage of directly triggering a MIDI note, a guitar has a vibrating string that needs to cycle around at least once before it can be recognized by the pitch-to-MIDI system as a musical note. For low notes, it can take over 10 milliseconds (ms) just for a cycle to complete itself, and longer for a note to stabilize and be a recognizable pitch. When combined with the delays inherent in the MIDI synths of the day, tracking delays of well over 50 ms for the guitars' lowest notes were the rule. This is easily enough time to create a bothersome pause between physical action and hearing a sound.

To get around this tracking delay, a few manufacturers created guitar-like controllers that produced no sound on their own, like the SynthAxe and the Yamaha G10, but provided reduced tracking delays by bypassing the pitch-to-MIDI conversion process. While a few well-known guitarists like Allan Holdsworth and Lee Ritenour employed the SynthAxe, guitar-like controllers never gained traction in the broader guitar marketplace. Instead, the dominant MIDI guitar technology from the early ’90s to today remains a hexaphonic pickup driving a pitch-to-MIDI conversion circuit, sometimes built into a synth unit (like Roland’s series of rack and floor guitar synths, such as the currently produced GR-55).

Fig. 1

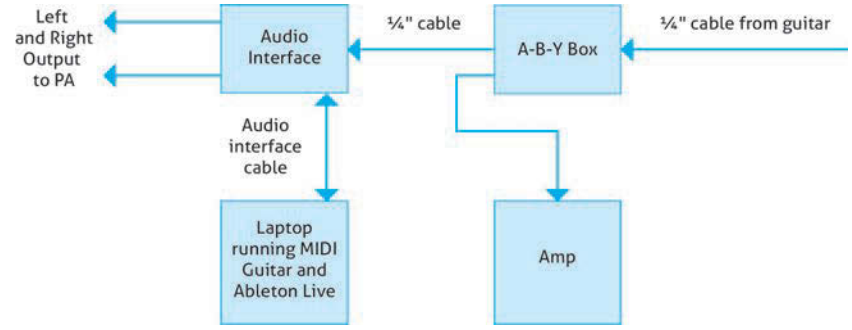
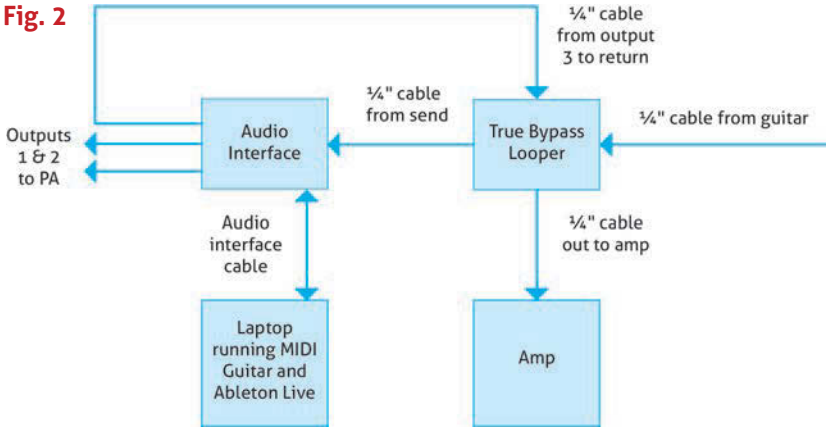


Fig. 2



In the last few years, there have been two notable advances in polyphonic MIDI guitar technology. The first is the Fishman TriplePlay guitar pickup, which transmits MIDI data wirelessly to a USB dongle for direct access to software synths and sequencing software. Tracking delays with the TriplePlay are dependent on software settings (sample rate and buffer size), but typical values for the Fishman TriplePlay seem to be comparable or perhaps slightly better than Roland’s current systems.

The second recent advance is Jam Origin’s MIDI Guitar software for computer or iOS devices, which requires no special pickup yet allows for polyphonic MIDI conversion. You connect your guitar to an audio interface, route it through MIDI Guitar, enable a software synth, and route out to a PA or amp. Measured tracking delays with MIDI Guitar software running as a VST plug-in within Ableton Live using a Zoom TAC-2 Thunderbolt audio interface set to a 44.1 kHz sample rate with a buffer setting of 64 samples, fell between about 30 ms for low notes and 20 ms for high notes.

While not perfect, these two systems offer a convenient—and thus very appealing—way to tap into the unlimited palettes of software synths and computer-based effects.

Setup

If you want to have a MIDI guitar setup that works in live situations, the first thing to consider is whether you want synth sounds to go to your amp or a PA. With a unit like the Roland GR-55 (which requires a divided pickup similar to the Roland GK-3), separate outputs are available for synth and guitar sounds. You can also route your standard, non-processed guitar signal to the synth outputs and send a blend of both signals to an amp or a PA.

With a laptop or tablet-based MIDI guitar synth setup, things can get a little more complicated. **Fig. 1** is a diagram of one way to set things up.

The limitation of the setup in Fig. 1 is that you can’t route computer-based effects or synth sounds to your amp. **Fig. 2** shows an alternative setup that

Fig. 3

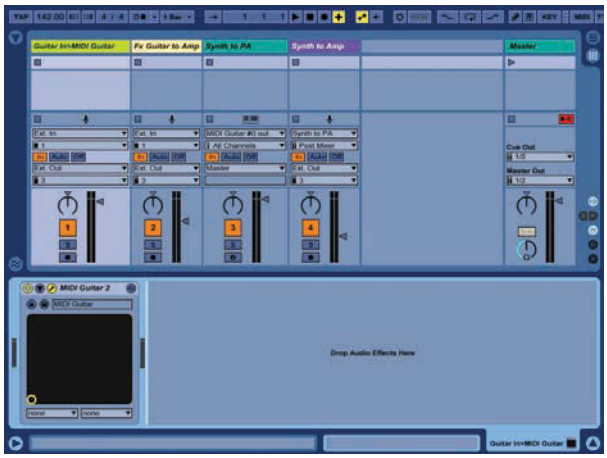
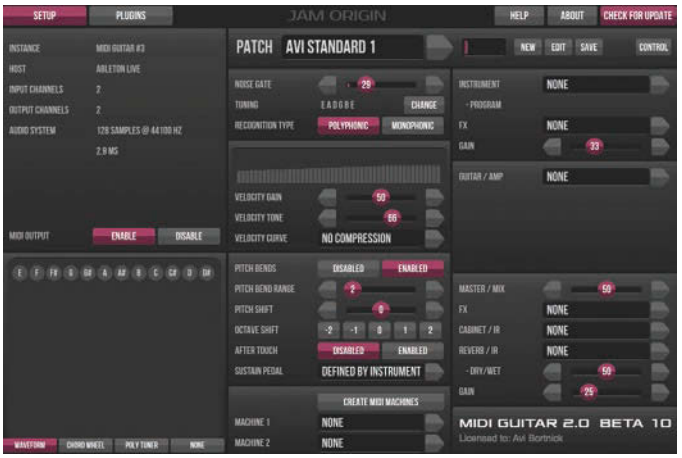


Fig. 4



will route laptop-based synth sounds or processed guitar to your amp.

With this second setup, the laptop essentially becomes an effects unit placed in a true bypass loop. It's easy to switch the laptop in and out by simply hitting one button. With this approach, you need at least three separate output channels on your interface, or if you're using a Mac, you can create an aggregate device in the Audio MIDI Setup utility to combine the interface and built-in outputs. With an aggregate device, you can run the Mac's stereo outs to a PA system and your guitar from a mono output on your interface back into the true bypass looper. You select the channels on which to route guitar or synth sounds via software.

Take a look at **Fig. 3** to see how I'd set this up in Ableton Live. This screen shot shows Ableton Live running Jam Origin's MIDI Guitar as a plug-in in the configuration illustrated in Fig. 2. Notice that the 2nd and 4th tracks are routed to output 3 (guitar amp) and the synth is routed to the master output stereo channels 1 and 2 (PA).

Fig. 4 shows my preferred settings in MIDI Guitar when running it as a plug-in in Ableton Live. Note that the buffer is set to 128 samples (upper left region), which typically provides very good low-latency performance, particularly with a Thunderbolt audio interface such as a Zoom TAC-2.

All the following audio examples use MIDI Guitar, because I like being able to play any of my electric guitars with MIDI without having a special pickup or pitch-to-MIDI interface.

Now What?

Once your guitar is set up as a MIDI controller, it would be easy to open a software synth plug-in and start noodling away, playing all the things one normally plays on guitar. The results could be passable, but often they're cringe-worthy. Tracking delay (even with the respectable results MIDI Guitar provides) can ruin a groove, the subtleties of muted notes and pick variations are lost, and slides and other guitaristic gestures can sound comical as translated by a synth.

And almost always, you have to play extremely cleanly to not trigger wrong and even out-of-key note blips. This can hamper your fluidity. Of course you can always blend in your guitar, so your musical intention is better captured, but this can lead to a dated, stacked-synth sound. In this realm, more is usually not better. What to do? The universe is infinite, but here are a few starting points to explore:

- Use synth sounds that have a soft attack to minimize the perceived tracking delay.
- Use slicer/chopping plug-ins post-synth to create in-the-pocket rhythms.
- Use MIDI plug-ins like arpeggiators and harmonizers to play things that would be impossible on the guitar.
- Trigger non-musical sounds, like speech snippets or noises.
- Use the guitar as a controller to trigger effects parameters, channel muting, and any other MIDI-controllable parameters that respond to note on/off messages.

The audio examples I've included here have two goals: (1) to avoid simply turning the guitar into a bogus keyboard and working within the limitations of using vibrating strings to control MIDI, and (2) to inspire you to think of novel ways to use your guitar with MIDI.

Talk about cheating! In **Ex. 1** and **Ex. 2**, I play single notes and let MIDI Guitar's built-in arpeggiator function do the hard work. The guitar is panned slightly to the left, with the synths a bit to the right. (To hear the audio examples for this article, go to premierguitar.com.)

After listening to **Ex. 3**, you might say, "I don't hear any MIDI guitar in this." I've set up Ableton Live to have three different effects that are turned on or off only by specific notes (E3, A3, and G4). In guitar terms, those refer to the open 6th string, the A at the 5th fret of the 6th string, and G on the 15th fret of the 6th string. Whenever I hit the open E the signal is sent to a panned delay effect.

The effect on the A note is a bit more complicated. It triggers a pre-made MIDI clip in Live that's a chromatic scale that starts on A and descends. This clip serves as a controller for the QuikQuak's PitchWheel plug-in, which receives audio from the guitar channel's send and MIDI from the chromatic MIDI clip. When A is struck, the clip starts (sending MIDI data to PitchWheel) and the send on the guitar input channel jumps from 0 to maximum, which sends audio to PitchWheel. To not have this chromatic pitch effect stay on, I have to hit the note again.

The high G that's triggered when I hit the E minor chord sends audio from the guitar input to a return channel with



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Ableton Live's Grain Delay plug-in with the Bubbles preset. Take a look at **Fig. 5** to see the PitchWheel plug-in in action.

Unfortunately, functions triggered with a MIDI note in Live are not momentary, so normally you would have to hit a note a second time to turn off a mapped parameter (as I did with the A3 triggered clip/effect). But thanks to the Momentary 8 plug-in made by Max for Ableton Live, incoming note messages are transformed from toggle to momentary. Thus, when the note stops, the effect is turned off.

In **Ex. 4**, I took audio of an auctioneer and matched his voice to a MIDI drum rack in Ableton Live. You can hear my original guitar track on the left side and the resulting triggered audio on the right. This example was inspired by the great drummer Deantoni Parks, who in his latest record, *Technoself*, samples speech, chops it up, and plays the deconstructed words on a keyboard with his right hand while he plays drums with his left hand. The effect is mesmerizing.

For this example (unlike the others), I slightly time-corrected the entire MIDI auctioneer sample track by 30 ms to roughly compensate for the latency I measured with MIDI Guitar that occurs in the pitch-to-MIDI process. Though it sounded good without the correction, it was just tighter with it.

Here's another example (**Ex. 5**) of using specific notes on the guitar to trigger effects. In this case, the effects are all within Izotope's Stutter Edit. I start by playing F notes, with ascending upper notes (starting on a high D) that will trigger various Stutter Edits presets. Then I play an arpeggiated figure, and finally some funk rhythm stuff. Because MIDI Guitar software is polyphonic, it can recognize notes that are within a chord, so that chords that contain particular notes will also trigger the effect.

Okay, finally an example of pure synth being playing by the guitar. But there would be no way to really play **Ex. 6** accurately without the help of rhythm-chopping plug-ins. Frankly, to my ears and from my experience trying, the current state of MIDI guitar is just not good enough to play rhythmically with a synth plug-in, particularly if you hope to capture all the funky note mutings and rhythmic scratches that help make rhythm guitar compelling. Perhaps it can be passable for simple rhythms, but generally, you cannot match what a good keyboard player can do rhythmically.

In Ex. 6, what I played on the guitar is pretty darn simple. I start with a basic single-note line and then go into some chords. But all I'm doing is holding chords for a half-note or full measure—the software is doing all the rest. MIDI Guitar is routed to a TAL Software's excellent TAL-U-NO-LX synth, and then getting chopped up, gated, delayed, and panned by the super-cool Audio Damage BigSeq2 plug-in (**Fig. 6**). I could post my dry guitar track, but like the Great Oz, I'd rather just say, "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain."

In this next example (**Ex. 7**), I play a melody in D minor and then at the end of the first phrase I hit a high D on the 1st string. This note is mapped to the channel "on" button of a synthesizer track in Ableton Live. Once you hit that note, the track is enabled. The channel has a scale plug-in before the synth set to harmonize all the notes I play up a third, but in the key of D natural minor/F major. I also bend notes here to illustrate MIDI Guitar's very usable pitch-bend tracking.

Sequencing and Notation

If you are ivory-challenged, using the guitar as a MIDI controller in conjunction with sequencing software or notation software can be a godsend. With sequencing software, latency and tracking delay concerns can be overcome since you can quantize or manually align notes. With most notation software, such as Sibelius or Finale, you can either import a MIDI part, or in some cases play directly into the software. Of course, you have to understand notation because inevitably you'll need to correct misinterpreted rhythms, simplify confusingly written rhythms, change enharmonic notes to ones that are easier to read, etc. But this isn't unique to guitar—imported or played MIDI parts almost always require cleanup, regardless of what controller created the parts.

Fig. 5



Fig. 6



In this notation example (**Ex. 8**), you can hear the raw guitar track playing a relatively simple melody in A minor. The guitar was converted to MIDI with both MIDI Guitar and Ableton Live's Convert Harmony to New MIDI Track function. The MIDI Guitar track was also copied and quantized. All three MIDI tracks were exported from Live as MIDI clips and imported into Overture notation software, which in my experience does as good a job at intelligently converting MIDI files to notation as any notation software.

While all three imports are in the ballpark, there are some problems (**Fig. 7**). First, the key signature was not automatically converted, so you need to know what key the clip is in. Second, the guitar should be written an octave higher than it sounds—standard practice for guitar notation. Third, the triplet in the second measure was not captured properly. And finally, the third measure came out differently in all the three imports, with the Ableton Convert to Harmony being the closest. The last staff shows the phrase more properly and

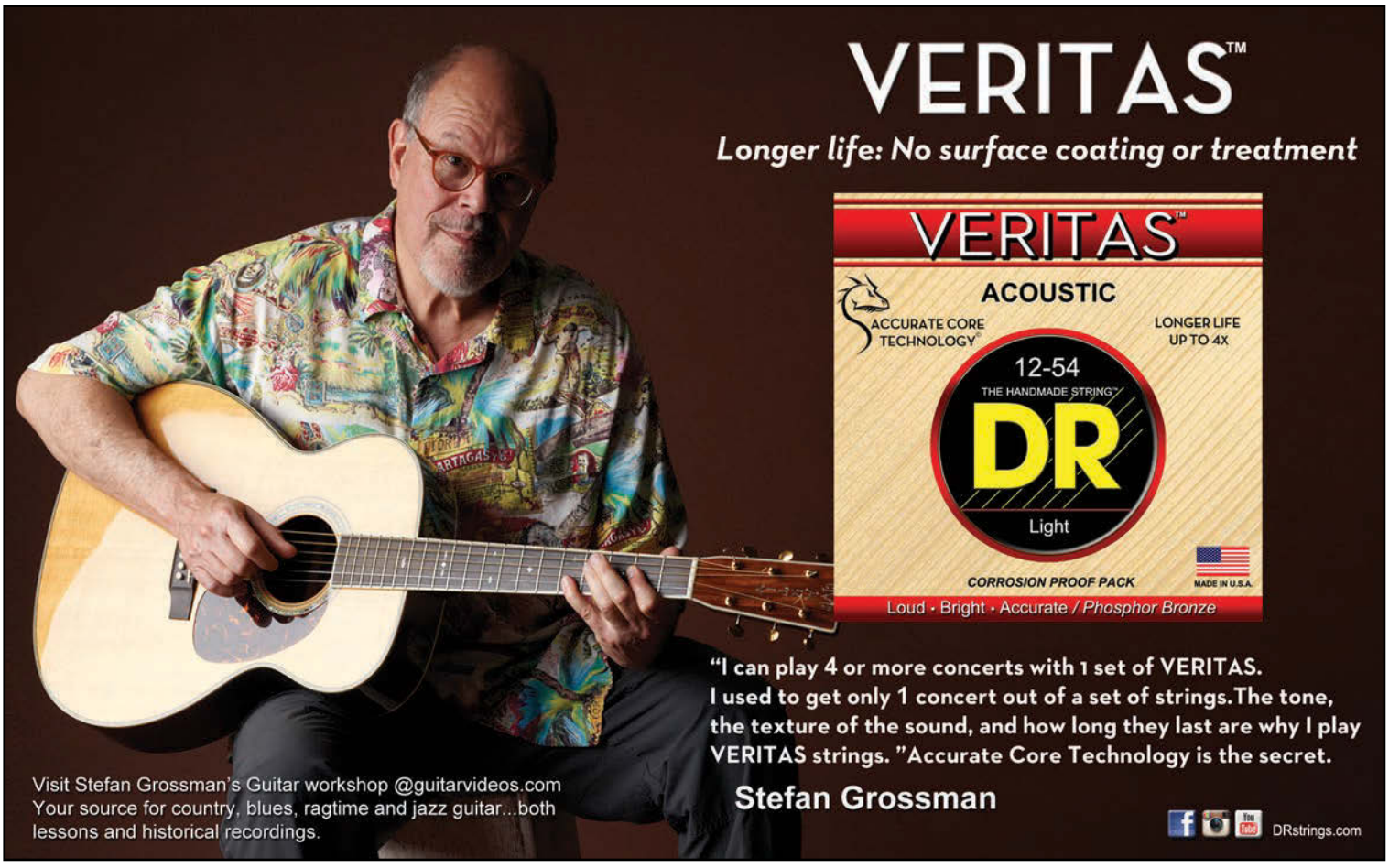
legibly notated, which I did manually. With even simpler lines, however, the chances of accurate MIDI transcription are higher, but you always need to be vigilant that the conversion-to-notation process was done accurately and legibly.

Using the guitar as a MIDI controller does have its pitfalls, but it can be an excellent creative and useful tool. As I've attempted to demonstrate with the examples in this article, you can use your guitar to trigger extra MIDI notes with arpeggiators or harmonizers, trigger effects, and play sounds that don't have to be "normal" instruments or even synths. You can correct for MIDI tracking delay and overcome groove-busting lags by forcing sounds through synchronized gating effects. An added bonus is that you can use guitar to input MIDI for sequencing and notation, though some cleanup is usually required. Hopefully, these examples get your brain thinking about novel and cool ways to use MIDI with guitar. Surprises await.

Fig. 7



To view larger images and see additional content to this story, head online to premierguitar.com/mar2016



Les Paul Master Wiring #3

BY DIRK WACKER

Hello fellow modders! It's time now to explore the third and final version of our master wiring schemes for the venerable Gibson Les Paul. So far, we've covered master volume plus master tone ("Les Paul Master Wiring #1") and master tone plus two volumes ("Les Paul Master Wiring #2"). If you missed either one, no worries—you'll find them waiting for you at premierguitar.com. In this third version, the volume pot is the master and it will be supported by two individual tone controls.

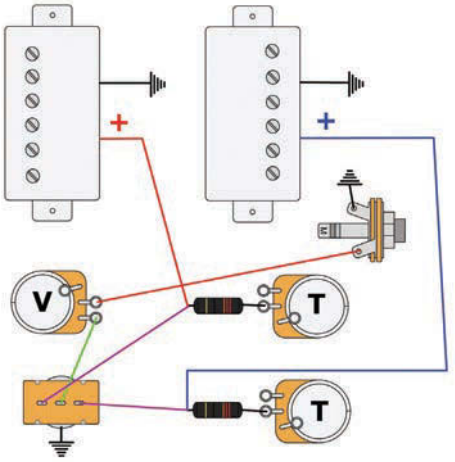
Although we call it a "Les Paul" master wiring, you can apply this mod to virtually any guitar with a similar dual-pickup, four-potentiometer configuration, such as an ES-335 or SG. And with a little ingenuity you can adapt it to any guitar with two pickups. For example, you can swap out the Gibson 3-way pickup selector toggle switch for a Fender-style pickup selector switch, which means you could use this wiring on a Telecaster. (Yes, my friends, there's just enough space on the control plate to install a third pot.)

I should also mention that having a master volume and two separate tone controls in a dual-humbucker configuration is nothing new, and Ibanez, Danelectro, and PRS are among the many companies that use this wiring on their guitars.

But back to the Les Paul: The basic idea of this wiring is to reduce the number of pots from four to three. The payoff? Removing the unused pot gives you room for an additional switch for yet another mod of your choice (a phase-reverse, coil-tap, or kill switch, for example). But you don't have to *add* anything extra to benefit from this simple mod—getting a clearer, more practical control layout is a legitimate goal, and you'll enhance your guitar's tone by removing unneeded or unwanted components from the circuit.

The basic idea of this wiring is that while sharing one common volume control, each of the two pickups has a dedicated tone control, and this allows you to use different tone caps to tweak the sound. Besides using different cap types for your neck and bridge pickups, you can also use different capacitance values.

A common combination is the standard value 0.022 µF for the bridge and a slightly lighter 0.015 µF value for the neck pickup, which inherently has less treble.



The basic idea of this wiring is that while sharing one common volume control, each of the two pickups has a dedicated tone control, and this allows you to use different tone caps to tweak the sound.

But you can also choose a more radical configuration. For instance, how about a very small 6800 pF silver mica cap for the bridge pickup—thus converting the bridge tone pot into a "warmth control" that will yield a super-sharp, contoured solo sound—in combination with a 0.033 µF paper-in-oil cap for the neck pickup. The latter would let you dial in deep, classic jazz tones or a warm rhythm sound. You can have a lot of fun experimenting to find a combination that works best for you.

Another benefit of this wiring is its "preset" function. You can dial in two completely different tones, as in the example above, and engage either with only a flip of the 3-way pickup selector switch. And because of the master volume configuration, you'll have both tones at almost unity volume—especially if you've adjusted pickup height with this in mind. Many players like this practical approach, so the setup is really worth a try.

There are several different ways to complete this wiring, but I opted for the one that requires the least changes in the stock Les Paul circuit. Also, it doesn't matter which of the two volume pots you want to keep because this wiring will work for either of them, so feel free to assign both pickups to the volume pot of your choice.

You'll have to desolder your guitar's stock caps from their original volume pots. If you're going to reuse the stock caps, take care not to shorten their legs more than necessary in the removal process. As shown in **Fig. 1**, you'll need them to connect to the hot outputs of the pickups, as well as the wires coming from the pickup selector switch.

That's it! Now that we've finally closed this LP master wiring series, next month we'll launch a different project. Until then ... keep on modding!



DIRK WACKER *lives in Germany and has been a guitar addict since age 5. He's also a hardcore DIY-er for guitars, amps, and stompboxes and runs a website on the subject (singlecoil.com). When not working at his guitar workbench, he plays country, rockabilly, surf, and flamenco. Contact him at info@singlecoil.com.*

Image courtesy of singlecoil.com



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Diagnosing an Ailing Blues Junior

BY JEFF BOBER

Q: ***Hi Jeff,***
I own a Fender Blues Junior and recently had to replace a fuse because it blew and the amp wasn't powering up. A replacement fixed that problem, but another arose. When I max all the controls I can barely get any volume out of the amp. The speaker is good. I removed the verb tank because it was bad. I also put the tubes from my AC15 in it—they are the same tube types and correctly placed. Not too long after turning the amp on, the tubes get really hot and I get a little burning smell. The amp barely puts out any power—maybe .2 watts. What could be the problem?
Thanks,
Micah



A: **Hi Micah,**
Often when a fuse blows in an amp, there's some sort of failure associated with it. Occasionally one may blow due to a problem with the mains voltage, such as a power outage while the amp is on followed by an immediate return of voltage. This could be a whole neighborhood power outage or just some practical joker turning your power strip off and then on again. ("Hey, thanks dude!") But usually there is some other cause for the failure.

The first major cause of a fuse blowing is an output tube that shorts. Sometimes the tube can remain shorted, and other times, once a replacement fuse is installed, the bad tube can begin working, only to fail again at some point. The best way to ascertain if you have an intermittent output tube is to run the amp for a while sans output tubes. If it doesn't blow the fuse, reinstall the tubes and see if it blows the fuse again. If so, at least one of your output tubes is intermittently shorting and they need to be replaced. This method is not foolproof, but may help you determine if you need new output tubes. Assuming that your fuse is no longer failing and you already substituted output tubes, we'll move on.

The next user-serviceable item I would normally check would be the preamp tubes, but you've done good substitutions here as well, so we know it's not a tube issue. What else could it be? Well, my next point of inspection would be the speaker. And while you mentioned that the speaker is good, I have to ask how you checked it. Did you measure the resistance of the speaker with a meter? Was the speaker connected to the amp while you did this? If so, that's incorrect. A speaker always needs to be disconnected before measuring across its terminals.

If the speaker was connected to the amp and you measured a typical 6 to 7 ohms of resistance, this tells me one of two things: Either the output transformer secondary is open (because you should be measuring a very low resistance, in the area of 1 or 2 ohms) or the speaker cable itself is open. The best way to check to see if a speaker and speaker cable are good is to first disconnect the speaker cable from the amp and then disconnect at least one lead of the cable from the speaker. Once you do this, measure the speaker itself. If the measurement is good, reconnect the cable to the speaker.

A recurring problem with amps of this particular design has to do with the small wires in the ribbon cables breaking.

Next, check the resistance at the speaker cable plug. If it reads correctly, then the speaker and cable are okay. If you get an open (infinity) reading, the cable is open. If you read close to zero, the cable is shorted. Because of the nature of the molded-end combo speaker cables I've seen used on amps over the years, I strongly recommend you follow through with these tests. I have seen my share of open or shorted cables, and either scenario would cause the amp to have little or no output and cause the output tubes to be overly stressed. If all checks out with the speaker and cable, we'll need to explore a few other possibilities.

WARNING:
All tube amplifiers contain lethal voltages. The most dangerous voltages are stored in electrolytic capacitors, even after the amp has been unplugged from the wall. Before you touch anything inside the amp chassis, it's imperative that these capacitors are discharged. If you are unsure of this procedure, consult your local amp tech.

A NEW GENERATION OF TWO-ROCK AMPS HAS BEGUN - INTRODUCING THE 2016 TWO-ROCK CARDIFF



Two-Rock

TWO-ROCK.COM

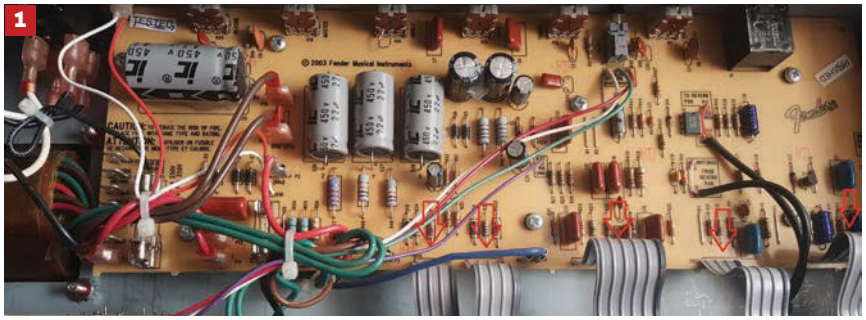
Note: While you may be able to verify a problem using the following info, unless you are familiar with working on tube amps—and circuit boards in particular—you may need to have the amp serviced by an experienced tech. If you have any doubts at all, seek out professional help.

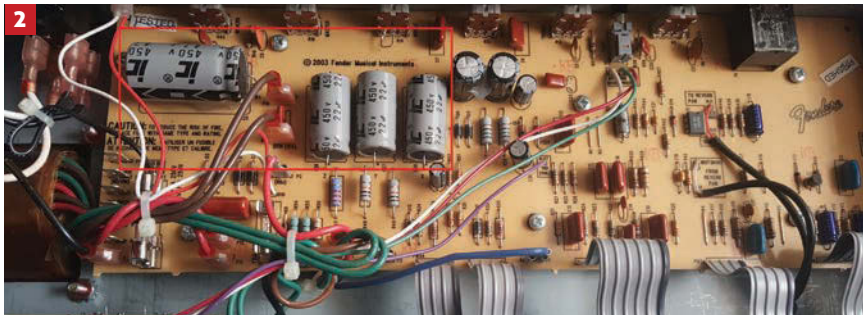
A recurring problem with amps of this particular design has to do with the small wires in the ribbon cables breaking. Closely inspect all the ribbon cables **(Photo 1)** and make sure that none of the conductors has broken where it enters the circuit board. If you're careful, you should be able to measure continuity using a multimeter. If this all checks out, it's time to start checking some voltages.

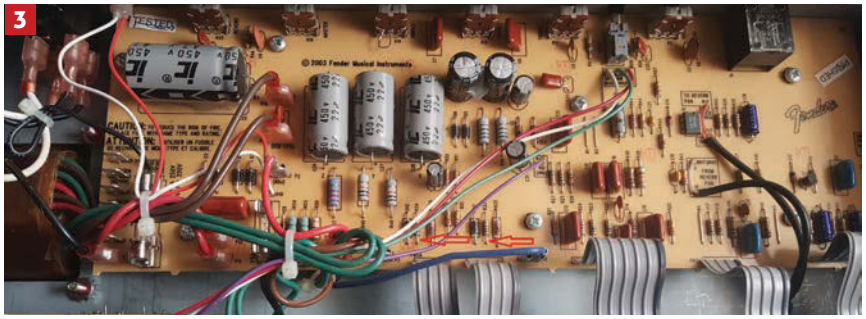
Because you mentioned the amp has some output, albeit very low, I'm going to assume that the high voltage power supply is working. You can quickly verify this by connecting the negative lead of your meter to the chassis and measuring the voltages on the + side of the four large 450V caps **(Photo 2)**. These voltages should range from approximately 400 to 250 volts. If this is good, we're going to move on to the low voltage supply, as this could actually tie together a couple of problems.

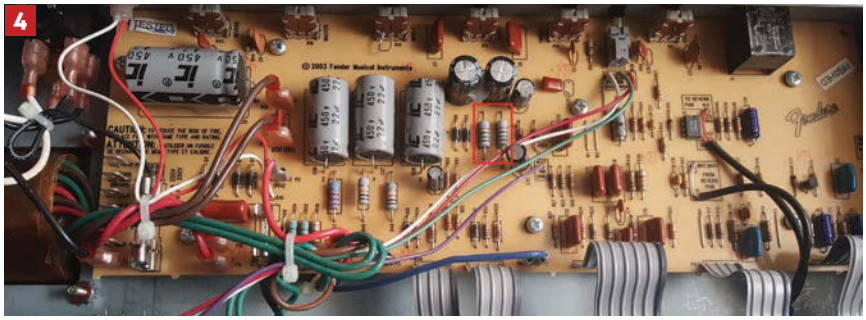
You mentioned you removed the reverb pan because it was bad, but do you know for sure that it's actually the *pan* that's bad? The low voltage supply in the amp not only provides the bias voltage to the output tubes, but also supplies the plus and minus 15V that powers the reverb IC chip. First you need to check the voltage on pin 2 of the output tubes. This would be the second pin counting clockwise in the space on the socket. It can also be measured on the circuit board at the 1.5k grid resistors **(Photo 3)**. This should read approximately -10VDC. If this is not present, check the voltages at the 750-ohm resistors in the low voltage supply **(Photo 4)**. Each side of each of these resistors should read +15 and -15 volts respectively. If not, repairing the cause of the failure may very well fix both the output and reverb problems with the amp.

I hope this helps breathe life back into Junior.











JEFF BOBER *is one of the godfathers of the low-wattage amp revolution. He co-founded and was originally the principal designer for Budda Amplification, though he launched EAST Amplification (eastamplification.com) in 2010. You can catch his podcasts at ampsandaxescast.com or email him at pgampman@gmail.com.*



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BossUS.com/DD-500

Cables

You owe it to yourself and your rig to have the all-important link between axe and amp in perfect working order to avoid hum, crackle, or an all-out fail. This month, we've put together a sampling of quality guitar cables built to deliver and last.

1
GEORGE L'S
.225 Prepackaged Cables

These thicker cables have low-capacitance coax cable, solderless connections, nickel-plated plugs or optional unplated brass plugs, and flexible stress-relief jackets.

$49 street (15 ft.)

georgelsstore.com

2
D'ADDARIO
Planet Waves American Stage Kill Switch Cable

This option has a built-in kill switch for silent instrument changes, a patented Geo-Tip design that ensures secure connections, and in-line soldering technology.

$54 street (15 ft.)

daddario.com

3
PRS
Signature Series

Highly flexible, tangle-free cables with low capacitance and excellent noise rejection, ultra-pure oxygen-free copper for sonic integrity, gold Neutrik connectors, and rugged construction that carries a lifetime warranty.

$49 street (18 ft.)

prsguitars.com

4
MOGAMI
Platinum

These cables feature Neutrik Silent Plugs that allow for hot swapping guitars without pops, conductive PVC to eliminate handling noise, and ultra-high density copper-spiral shielding for a silent background.

$164 street (20 ft.)

mogamicable.com

5
EVIDENCE AUDIO
The Melody

To combat the negative effects of strand interaction, these cables utilize a single solid-core IGL copper conductor for positive, with parallel-run conductors on the ground path to provide shielding with minimal crosstalk.

$97 street (15 ft.)

evidenceaudio.com





6
ASTEROPE
Pro Stage Series

Designed to deliver a broader bandwidth of sound than traditional cables, with unidirectional design, patented ultra-clarity connectors, and durable exterior jacketing.

$99 street (15 ft.)

asterope.com

7
LAVA CABLE
Ultramafic Flex

This low-capacitance cable features a pair of low strand count, 20 gauge, silver-plated copper conductors, triple shielding, and a 98 percent braided shield. Each cable comes standard with Neutrik X-Series plugs.

$83 street (15 ft.)

lavacable.com

8
MONSTER
Classic Coiled

These cables utilize a magnetic flux-tube design to deliver clear, natural sound. The 90-percent copper spiral-wrap shielding prevents unwanted buzz and hum, and the Duraflex outer jacket resists slicing, bending, and breaking.

$49 street (21 ft.)

monsterproducts.com

9
TAYLOR
V-Cable

The 250k ohms impedance makes these ideal for the hotter outputs of single-coil pickups. The inline, easy-to-access volume dial located on the instrument-end jack offers an easy solution for acoustic systems with no volume controls.

$49 street (18 ft.)

taylorguitars.com

10
COLOSSAL
Sweet Fats

Hand-soldered cables with silver-plated copper conduction and braided shields, a protective film with pure gold and silver for improved conductivity and reduced oxidation, and Amphenol Pro Series connectors.

$111 street (16 ft.)

colossalcable.com

Quick Hits

RED IRON AMPS
Pedal Pusher
By Charlie Saufley



The robust, utilitarian Pedal Pusher from Red Iron Amps doesn't provide an espresso rush of instant aural gratification. But subtlety and transparency are the beauty of the Pedal Pusher.

The Pedal Pusher looks built to survive an Antarctic expedition inside and out. The hand-wired circuitry, which is driven by a subminiature tube and transformer (it requires its own dedicated AC power cable) looks more akin to the no-nonsense guts of a simple vintage amplifier.

I used the Pedal Pusher in front of new and vintage Fender amps, analog delays, and a Tonebender clone. By itself, the Pedal Pusher lent depth to thin single coil bridge tones—especially in the compressed and gain-boost modes. And though the volume-boost range of the pedal itself is narrow, it generates warm, organic amp growl when maxed. Where I really loved the Pedal Pusher was out in front of the Tonebender clone and analog delays. The fuzz often felt more flexible (I could hear enhancements to already nice germanium dynamics) and the delay repeats sounded more colorful for the additional drive. There are simpler, cheaper preamp solutions, but this pusher sounds great and delivers as advertised.

TEST GEAR *Fender Jaguar, Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster, silverface Fender Bassman, blackface Fender Tremolux, Fender Champion 600, Jesse Trbovich TrboBender, Boss DM-2W, MXR Carbon Copy.*

RATINGS

$329 street, redironamps.com

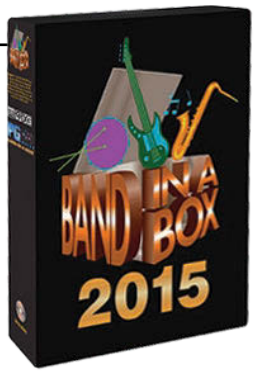
Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	3.5

PROS Robust, hard-wired, point-to-point construction. Quiet performance.

CONS Expensive.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR *this pedal at premierguitar.com/mar2016*

PG MUSIC
Band-in-a-Box
By Jason Shadrick



The latest version of PG Music's well known Band-in-a-Box software is a great tool—not only for practicing, but also transcription and composition. The program is deep, capable, and comes with plenty of documentation. But the centerpiece of BIAB is the ability to type in any chords you want and have the program craft a stylistically appropriate accompaniment using audio recorded by real musicians (called RealTracks). My band is working up a version of the Band's "Ophelia," which has a rather tricky solo section. Within a few minutes of starting up the program, I had a useful backing track in a driving bluegrass style featuring some of Nashville's finest playing some killer rhythm parts and fills. (Head over to the online version to hear an example.)

Not all styles have RealTrack capabilities, and that's where the MIDI-sounding tracks come in. However, I found that nearly all of the examples I'd use had some form of real audio accompaniment. Another fun feature was the ability to export animated videos of the chord chart synced up with the audio. It was a great help to send the videos to bandmates who don't have BIAB to play along with. If you can get around the clunkier aspects of the interface, BIAB is one of the most useful tools for inquisitive musicians out there.

RATINGS

Starting at $129 street, pgmusic.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	3
Build/Design	3.5
Value	4

PROS Easily expandable set of RealTracks. Extremely high quality audio. Plenty of documentation.

CONS Sometimes hard-to-navigate interface.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR *this software at premierguitar.com/mar2016*

F-PEDALS

Eddie Kramer Series PhazeVibe Lite

By Charlie Saufley



With Eddie Kramer's name on the enclosure, it's natural to assume F-Pedals' petite Phaze Vibe Lite is a Jimi-inspired vibe for the space constrained. It isn't—at least not exclusively. But that's one of the coolest things about this little pedal. It's a multi-modulation machine that generates fairly classic sounding phaser and vibe sounds as well as a few unique hybrid modulation tones that are less familiar, but very effective.

The Phaze Vibe isn't the most robust pedal. The plastic underside of the enclosure and modulation function switch both feel chintzy. There are also some performance inconsistencies. The Mod 1 mode, for example, is oddly quiet.

The sounds themselves, though, are cool. Mod 1 crosses a Uni-Vibe type sound and a phaser. F-Pedals calls Mod 2 a "wah-wah vibe," and the deep pulses result in very hip, fast-Leslie tones that sound cool with low tone settings and funky organ-style chord phrases. Mod 3 is another strange cross between a phaser and vibrato with a hint of tremolo-like pulsation that's cool for propulsive arpeggios. Authentically vintage, the PhazeVibe Lite is not. But it offers a pretty wide selection of modulation shades in a compact and easy-to-afford package.

TEST GEAR *Fender Jaguar, silverface Fender Bassman with 2 X 12 cabinet, Fender Champion 600*

RATINGS

$139 street, f-pedals.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Interesting and unique modulation sounds.

CONS Some quality concerns and cheap materials.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR *this pedal at premierguitar.com/mar2016*

DECIBEL 11

Dirt Clod

By Shawn Hammond



Players who crave multiple outboard overdrive and distortion flavors but hate programmable effects may see a compelling middle ground in the Decibel 11 Dirt Clod. Its all-analog signal path is controlled by gain (labeled "dirt"), mid ("core"), treble ("crystal"), and output ("mass") knobs, and you can access up to 10 presets in two ways: In Preset mode, footswitch A scrolls through sounds while footswitch B engages or bypasses the pedal. Bank mode lets you use the footswitches to toggle between two sounds as if you had separate pedals running side by side.

The dirt knob has three *other* functions, too. Tap it to toggle between two clipping styles (one is thicker, the other—indicated by the adjacent "form" LED—is slightly more focused and compressed) or hold it for five seconds to save a preset or, in Bank mode, press it as you use the footswitches to scroll through dual-preset banks.

Despite its clever digital controllability, the Dirt Clod serves up organic sounds that range from impressively transparent boosts and glassy overdrives to thick blues and mean hard-rock tones.

TEST GEAR *Squier Vintage Modified Jazzmaster w/Seymour Duncan Antiquity II pickups, Jaguar HC50 combo*

RATINGS

$189 street, decibel11.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Nice analog tones. Easy to adjust and program. 16-channel MIDI controllability.

CONS Can't get very brutal. EQ could be more expansive. Side-by-side presets can't be cascaded in Bank mode.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR *this pedal at premierguitar.com/mar2016*

PG PREMIERGuitar PREMIER GEAR

MUSIC MAN
St. Vincent

By Joe Gore

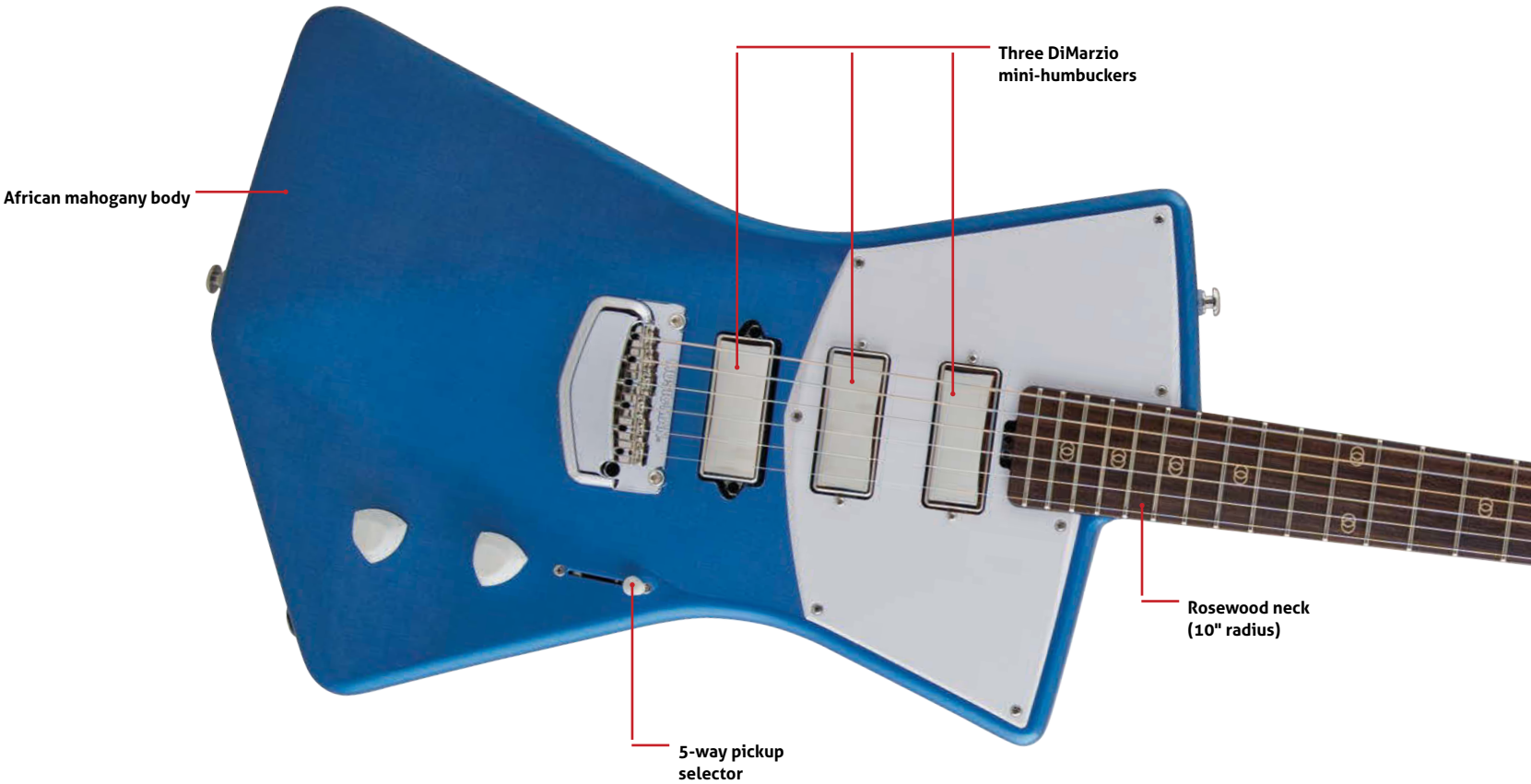
It's no secret that many "artist signature" guitars aren't all that different from a company's stock models. Jigger with surface cosmetics, maybe tweak the electronics a bit, and voilà — you've got a "new" model to sell at an upmarket price.

Music Man's St. Vincent is nothing like that. Designed top to bottom by Annie "St. Vincent" Clark with help from the Ernie Ball/Music Man lutherie team, the instrument is as bold, imaginative, and thoughtful as Clark's extraordinary guitar work.

Old-School Modern

The St. Vincent's angular, geometric body is unapologetically Modernistic—and that's upper-case "Modernistic" in the mid-20th-century-design sense. Guitar history geeks will probably flash on 1957/1958, when Gibson created the Flying V, Explorer, and Moderne. Designed by visionary Gibson honcho Ted McCarty, these instruments (along with 1963's Ray Dietrich-designed Firebird) aimed to update Gibson's then-stodgy image with a bit of Fender's space-age panache.

It's easy to imagine the St. Vincent's angular body in the McCarty sketchbook alongside the abstractly geometric V and Explorer. But the St. Vincent's ergonomics are superior to those midcentury classics. Unlike the V, for example, Clark's guitar is as comfortable to play seated as standing. The African mahogany body balances beautifully. There's no conventional cutaway, but you have clearance up to the 19th fret, where you can position your index finger for easy access to the top three frets. The upper and lower bouts are beveled slightly in relation to the guitar's centerline, providing a Strat-like armrest and



creating the illusion of a multicolored top in some lighting conditions. Clark even hand-mixed the steely-blue finish color. (The guitar is also available in black.)

Slight but Solid

The St. Vincent weighs a mere 7 pounds, thanks to its svelte, slim-waisted body shape. It's a great choice for players of smaller stature, or anyone whose back or shoulders object to overweight axes. But despite its modest weight and slender proportions, nothing about the St. Vincent feels insubstantial.

The stout rosewood neck has a 10" radius and a relaxed D shape. Its back is only lightly oiled, providing a raw-wood feel and a solid grip. The 25.5"-scale fretboard has 22 immaculately installed and rounded frets. The fulcrum-tremolo bridge is geared for quick, Van Halen-esque deep dives, but it's also capable of subtle vibrato under an ultra-light touch. Pitch stability is about as good as it gets on guitars without locking trems. (The locking Schaller tuners help, as does the expertly installed and intonation-compensated nut.) Build quality is excellent across the board.

There are many cool cosmetic details, including the vertically oriented pickguard, triangular knobs, and interlocking-circle position markers. The only visual misstep for me is the standard Music Man headstock. I dig its compact yet elegant shape and offbeat 4+2 tuner layout, but to my eye, at least, its relaxed curves and pearloid tuner buttons don't quite harmonize with the body's clean angles and stark white plastic hardware. Having said that, the dark shade of the neck and headstock makes these elements recede into the background. Your eyes can't help but focus on the bold blue body.

Wicked Wiring

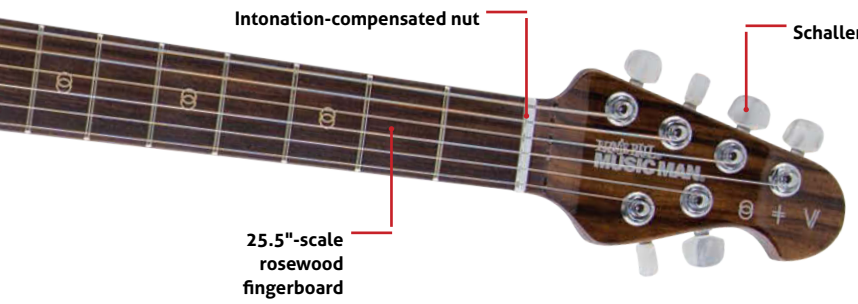
The guitar's electronics are as unconventional as its angles. Clark opted for three mini-humbuckers—shades of Gibson's Firebird VII. There's a 5-way selector switch, but the pickups aren't wired Strat-style. Positions 1, 2, and 3 solo each of the pickups. Position 4 combines all three pickups in parallel, while position 5 blends the outer two. You can't get the sound of two combined adjacent pickups, as from Strat positions 2 and 4, but that's cool—the all-three setting provides crisp, articulate "out-of-phase" sounds, and the neck and bridge harmonize gloriously.

I confess I've never owned a mini-humbucker guitar. These DiMarzios sound terrific, but it took me an hour or two of playing to get the hang of them. They have a snappy, focused attack compared to conventional humbuckers, and a more hair-trigger tonal response. They can seem dark at times, yet highs can erupt violently when you dig in. Once you get acclimated, though, they can be extraordinarily dynamic. Just be aware that they respond differently than most humbuckers or single-coils. Nor do they behave like P-90s, though, like P-90s, their clean tones tend to be rough-edged and "furry" relative to single-coils, while distorted tones usually have more snap and string-to-string differentiation than on humbucker guitars.

The St. Vincent doesn't lack low end power, but macho chunk isn't its strong suit. Heavily overdriven tones tend to evoke early Zep or AC/DC, with crisp attack and strong note definition. Nor is the guitar terribly twangy—clean tones maintain bulk, and you never get anything quite like, say, a soloed bridge pickup on a Strat or Tele. But these aren't complaints. I dig the St. Vincent's unique voice and the way it adds new colors to your palette. And whether you play clean, dirty, or in-between, you'll appreciate the excellent intonation and rich, ringing sustain.

The Verdict

Annie Clark's signature model is visually striking. But its distinctiveness is more than skin-deep. Its superb ergonomics are perfect for players seeking a big-guitar sound from a light, lean-bodied instrument. The build quality is excellent. Three mini-humbuckers and unconventional wiring provide many distinctive tones, all of which benefit from the guitar's fine intonation and great natural sustain. The price may seem steep for a solidbody with a bolt-on neck, but this is a unique new design, and the detail work and setup are fantastic. (Some skilled technician invested substantial bench time fine-tuning this instrument.) The St. Vincent is as cool, clever, and engaging as, well, a new St. Vincent album.



CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this guitar at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Ernie Ball/Music Man St. Vincent

$1,899 street
music-man.com

Tones	
Playability	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Unique looks and tones. Excellent build quality. Light, ultra-ergonomic design.

CONS Some traditionalists may flinch.

Best in Class



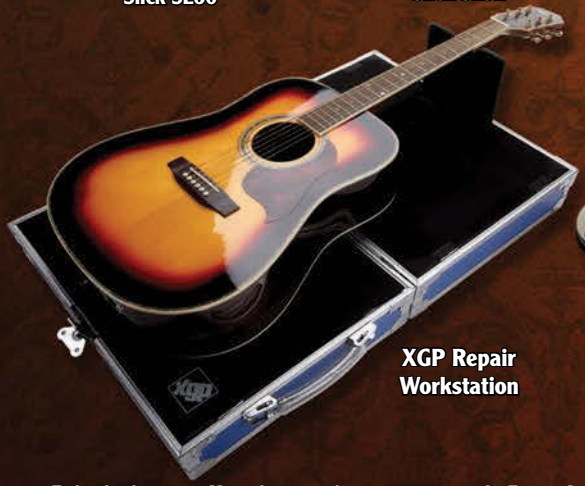
Slick SL60

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Xaviere XV975

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DR. NO
Road Runner

By Joe Gore



Whoa! Someone's having a little too much fun here. Start with the nine-word product name: Dr. No Road Runner Octave Fuzz Wah Flying Machina. Then there's the enclosure: peach-fuzz flocked in loud blue and red. And the rubber treadle pad, embossed with a lurid three-color design. And the *pièce de résistance*: rubber Hermes-style side-wings. (The control labels and product notes cleverly inscribed on the wah's bottom plate include a warning: "This device actually flies … cannot be held responsible for physical damage like broken bones just because you can't fly the damn thing.") Color me amused.

Dutch boutique brand Dr. No created this outrageous contraption with and for David Catching, the Eagles of Death Metal guitarist and owner of Rancho de La Luna, a famed recording studio in California's Mojave Desert. Beneath Machina's hilarious cosmetics lies a straightforward octave fuzz/wah effect with a few cool twists.

You Shall Not Pass!

I can't tell you what's inside the Flying Machina because I couldn't open it. Perhaps it's been deliberately battened down for secrecy's sake. The pedal has no battery option—you must use a 9V power supply. So there's no reason to remove the plate unless you're a stompbox busybody.

Dr. No describes the octave-fuzz circuit as an "old school" Octavia. The original Tycobrahe Octavia employed three silicon transistors plus a transformer and a pair of clipping diodes. It had two knobs: boost (distortion amount) and volume. The Machina adds two popular Octavia mods: an octave on/off switch (it bypasses the octave-generating transformer for a conventional fuzz sound), and a third knob on the crunch side, which sounds like an input-trim control. (At any rate, dialing it back yields the same result as rolling back your guitar's volume knob.) While you can switch the octave effect on and off, fuzz and wah are always active—you can't use either alone or invert the effect order.

The wah portion boasts switchable frequency ranges. The mildest setting is comparable to the sweep of a '60s-style wah, goosing frequencies from around 400 Hz to 1.8 kHz. Two brighter settings boost frequencies from about 600 Hz to 2.1 kHz, and from approximately 800 Hz to 2.4 kHz. If those numbers mean nothing to you, think of them as "regular bright," "extra-bright," and "incinerate." The filtering effect comes on slowly in the lower half of the pedal's range. Intensity increases and accelerates in the upper range. You'll probably get the hang of the sweep after a few minutes of playing. The brighter settings can seem harsh in isolation, but they could be perfect for blasting through heavy riffage in a multi-guitar band. They bite, in the better sense of the word.

Octivate Me!

Octave-fuzz will forever be associated with Hendrix. (Jimi didn't use a Tycobrahe, but his Roger Mayer octave fuzz was quite similar.) Bear in mind that this octave sound is far subtler than that from later octave fuzzes such as the Foxx Tone Machine (and Tone Machine spinoffs such as the Prescription Experience and Fulltone Ultimate Octave pedals), and *nothing* like the digitally generated octaves of, say, a DigiTech Whammy pedal. The octave sound is most prominent when playing single notes above the 12 th fret while using your neck pickup. (Many modern Octavia fans care less about the unreliable octave than about the harmonic anarchy that can occur when you throw the circuit a curve by, say, lowering your guitar volume or playing chords.)

Typically, Octavias aren't very loud, providing little to no volume boost when engaged. And while many Machina wah tones cut like a hot knife through soft brains, the overall level doesn't increase, even with everything floored—so you'd need a downstream booster for a louder solo level. Octavias don't tend to clean up much when you roll back your guitar's volume—the fuzz just gets less intense. Octavia-style fuzz minus the octave can also sound a bit bland, but when paired with the wicked wah in the Flying Machina, it can do serious damage.

Loogie Oogie Oogie

Some guitarists love the suave, understated response of early wahs like the Clyde McCoy. Those players probably shouldn't be in the same room as the Machina—maybe not even on the same continent.

The filtering here is angry and over-the-top. Paired with the always-on fuzz, the wah sweeps evoke decrepit analog synth filters, rutting pigs, and the scraping sound in the back of your throat when you hock a loogie. Pretty, it ain't—but it could be perfect for heavy, dissonant, and aggressive rock.

The Verdict

Dr. No's Flying Machina combines two classic circuits for bold, sometimes brutalizing results. It's fun as hell, even when you're not savoring the cockamamie cosmetics. But there are potential issues, like no independent use of wah and fuzz, no fuzz volume boost, and a near-total absence of sonic subtlety.

For $366 plus $50 shipping, you could get a great Octavia clone and a fine multi-range wah and still have a Benjamin in your wallet. The high price is surely due to the decoration. But for the well-heeled aggro-rocker who values a bold visual stage presence, this could be the ticket. Put your tray tables in the upright locked position and enjoy your flight.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this pedal at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Dr. No Road Runner Octave Fuzz Wah Flying Machina

$366 street
drno-effects.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	5
Value	3

PROS Memorable appearance. Super-aggressive wah tones. Three selectable wah ranges. Switchable octave. Power-indicator light.

CONS Can't use wah and fuzz separately. Can't invert effect order. Limited fuzz dynamic range. No 9V battery option. Expensive.





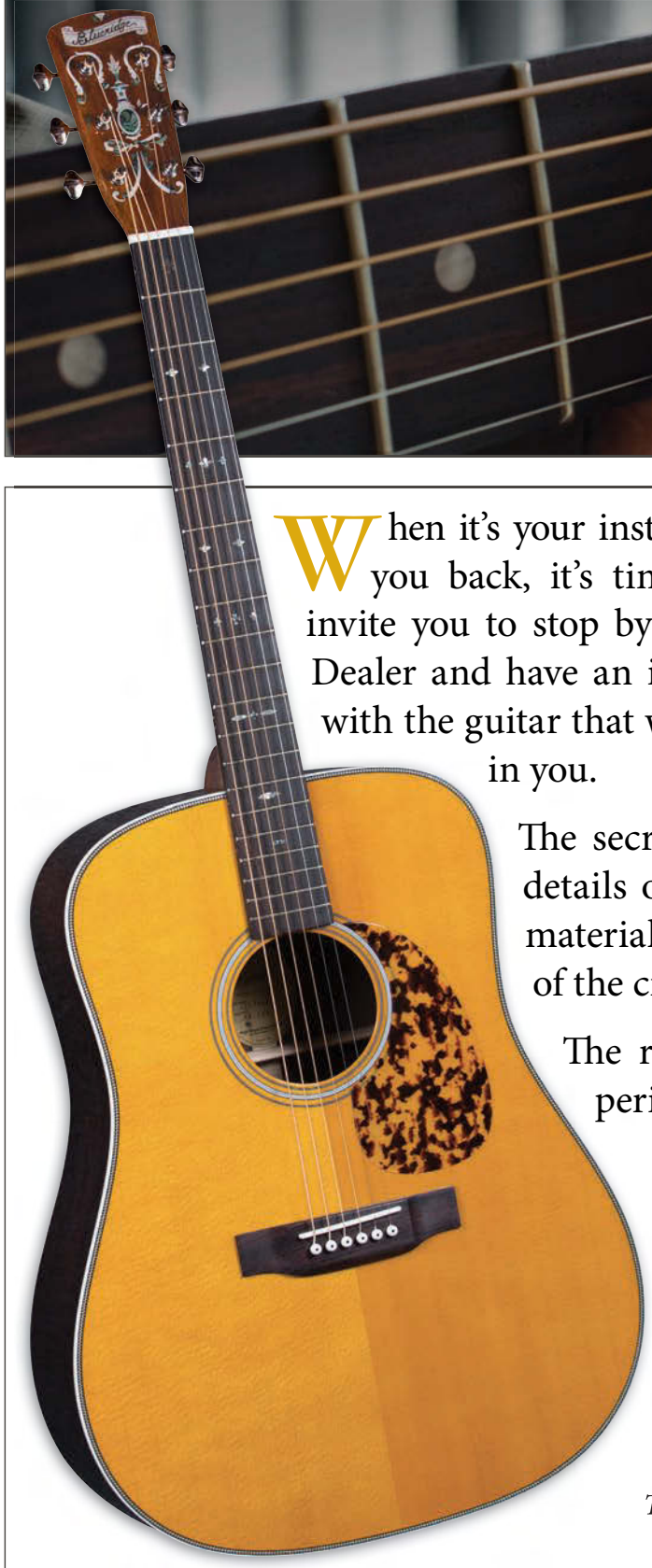
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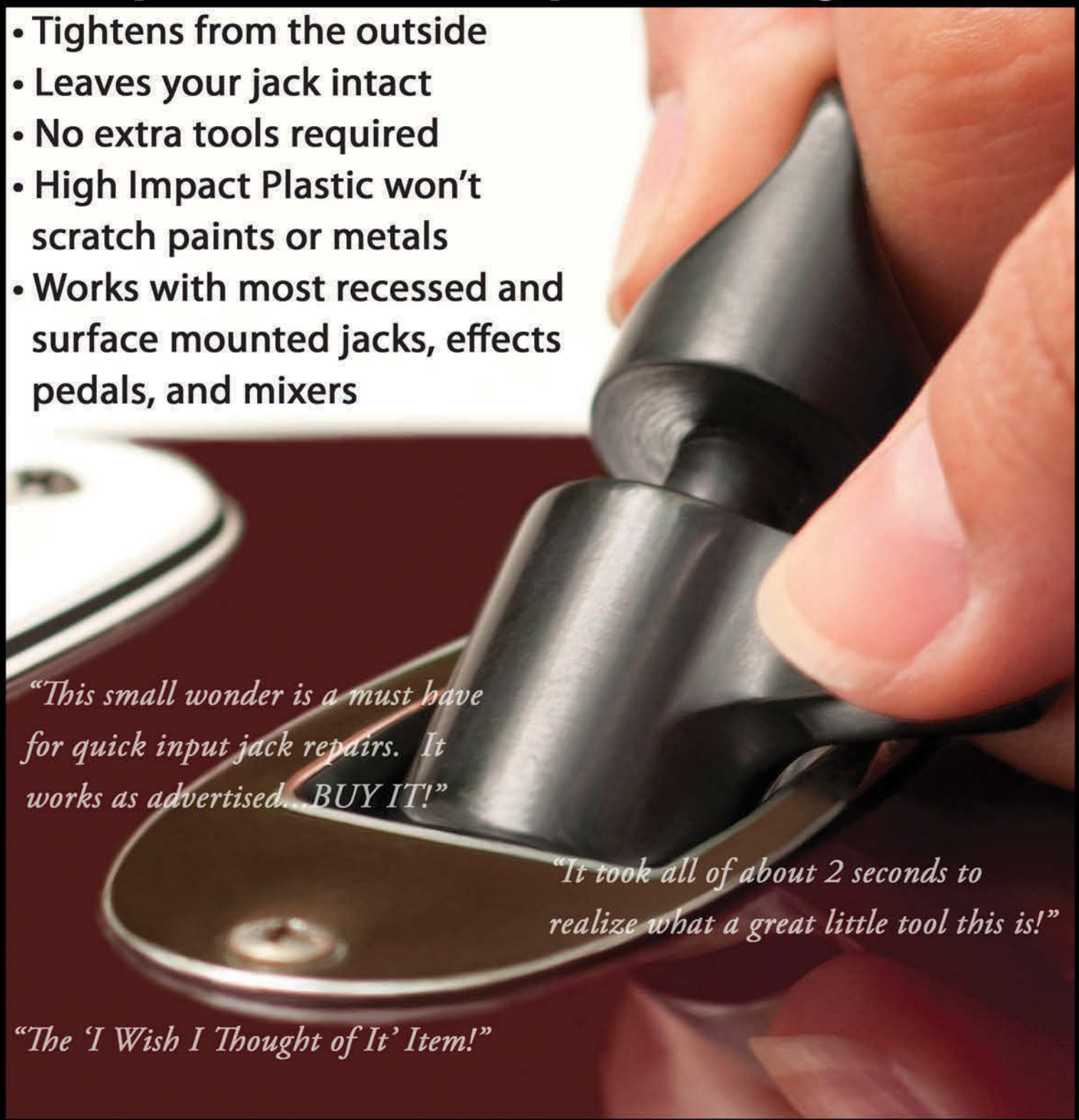
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MESA/BOOGIE Subway D-800 & Ultra-Lite Cabinets

By Jordan Wagner

It might surprise some that the first amp produced by Mesa/Boogie—a company widely known for offerings for guitarists—was a bass amp. Dubbed the Mesa 450 and clad in silver snakeskin, it was the very first amp built from scratch by company founder Randall Smith under the Mesa name. And the design concepts of its monster power section have influenced those of nearly every high-wattage bass amp that Mesa has released since. With the new Subway D-800, however, the company decided to take a different route—one that eschewed traditional tube-based circuitry for modern class-D design. The result is an amp with impressive clarity, power, and definition that lives up to its storied pedigree, all within a pint-sized package.

Take the "D" Train

The D-800's class-D power amp provides a heady 800 watts without adding extraneous bulk. The D-800 weighs in at only 5 ½ pounds, making it nowhere near the backbreaker that an all-tube amp with the same wattage would generally be. Simply slide it into its included padded bag, a gig bag, or a backpack, and you're good to go.

Operating the amp is delightfully simple. Directly to the right of the ¼" input jack is a trio of switches: an output mute, a -10 dB input pad for active pickups, and a deep switch for fattening the amp's low end. It doesn't take much effort to reach over and flip a switch, but I wouldn't complain if the mute and deep modes were footswitchable on future versions of the amp.

The amp's tones are sculpted by a 4-band EQ section with controls for bass, low- and high-midrange frequencies, and treble, along with knobs for setting the input gain and maneuvering between flat and boosted voicings. When the voicing dial is set to the far left, the amp has a flat frequency response. Turning it further to the right provides a gradual boost to the highs and lows, resulting in a mid-scooped sound.

The amp's rear panel houses two Speakon jacks with a switch for selecting either 2-ohm or 4/8-ohm loads. The amp will maintain its maximum rating of 800 watts when used with 2- or 4-ohm speaker loads, but the rating lowers to 400 watts when it's in use with an 8-ohm load. There's a direct output section that contains a phantom power protected XLR out tied to switches for selecting



post or pre EQ, line or microphone levels, and ground-pin lifting. There's also a pair of ¼" jacks for connecting an auxiliary device and a set of headphones for confined-to-the-bedroom jamming.

The matching Subway Ultra-Lite 1x12 and 1x15 cabs we received are built from Italian poplar and feature specially tuned Tri-Port porting with aviation-style bracing. The 400-watt cabs are wrapped in Mesa's traditional black-bronco vinyl and outfitted with a custom neodymium speaker and high-frequency horn with a +/- 2 dB rotary attenuator. Weighing in at a hair shy of 33 and 38 pounds, respectively, these cabs are some of the lightest Mesa has ever produced.

Transit Line Authority

After connecting the 1x12 and 1x15 cabinets to the D-800, I plugged in a Fender Precision and set the EQ and voicing controls to noon. Even with the input and master knobs conservatively set to 10 o'clock, the rig packed quite a wallop. The note separation and squeaky-clean clarity Mesa bass amps are known for was there in spades, but with a response that was more *even* than I've experienced from their amps in the past.

The highs responded with an authoritative snap when I used a pick, and their edginess backed off naturally when I used my fingers to softly pluck melodic lines. In contrast, the lows were smooth and felt like they reached through the floor—so much so that I could hear objects rattling against the walls in the next room. If you're worried the D-800 is going to win you more enemies than friends behind the local club's sound booth, you shouldn't be. The amp is capable of achieving the same responsiveness and fullness at lower volumes through careful adjustments with the input and master knobs.

The D-800's voicing control wields the most power for shaping tones. There's a wealth of genre-specific sounds living within either side of its range, spanning from mid-heavy rock grind and jazz warmth on the flat side, to scooped and springy funk-friendly slap tones towards its boosted range. Keeping the EQ knobs pointed straight up, I easily dialed in great tones befitting the aforementioned styles with the voicing control alone. (I used the EQ controls to tweak to taste afterwards.) As easy peasy as that sounds—and really, it was that easy—there was a noticeable loss of warmth in the mids when I set the voicing knob beyond 2 o'clock. I fixed this issue with no fuss by simply turning up the input slightly to thicken up the tone and round off the highs a little, and then lowering the master volume.

One of the best qualities of the D-800 is how well the EQ controls are voiced. I found that the high- and low-mid controls—when used separately—had a subtle yet efficient effect on the tone. For example, while nearly maxing out the high-mid knob with the low-mid control remaining at noon yielded a fair amount of extra upper-midrange, it wasn't to an obnoxious level. Having used so many amps that offer similar midrange controls with higher ranges that are, quite frankly, unusable in many situations, this careful voicing was refreshing. The shape of the midrange frequencies is incredibly important within a bass tone, and the D-800's controls are simple and effective enough to both satisfy seasoned players and teach novices how to use them capably to achieve strong, full tones that sit well in a mix.

The Ultra-Lite 1x12 and 1x15 delivered plenty of volume and power—more than enough for small- and mid-sized clubs. The neo speakers pushed a lot of air, even when I had the amp at lower volumes within the 9 and 11 o'clock range. Their horns projected nicely without any harshness, and never once succumbed to farting out at high volumes. Again, what impressed me the most was how exceptionally well they carried the low end through the floor of the room. The changes in resonance, volume, and low-end thickness I felt from just changing between light and heavy fingerpicking made the rig feel alive and breathing. Ultimately, the Ultra-Lites are simply great cabs that have the volume and projection of some others twice their size.

The Verdict

For bassists in the market for a portable high-powered amp that delivers clean and authoritative tones at any volume, the Subway D-800 is an excellent option that covers all of those bases and more. Its asking price of 700 bones should be relatively easier to swallow for budget-conscience bassists looking to adopt a Boogie amplifier into their rigs, but adding in the cost of the equally exceptional 1x12 and 1x15 cabs *might* make some opt for the head only. All that said, this new amp/cab combination from Mesa/Boogie is one to be reckoned with.

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CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this amp at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Mesa/Boogie Subway D-800

$699 street
mesaboogie.com

Tones	5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4.5

PROS Lightweight and extremely portable. Gobs of power at the ready. Fantastic tones and versatility with simple controls. Approachable price point.

CONS Footswitchable mute and deep modes would be ideal additions.

RATINGS

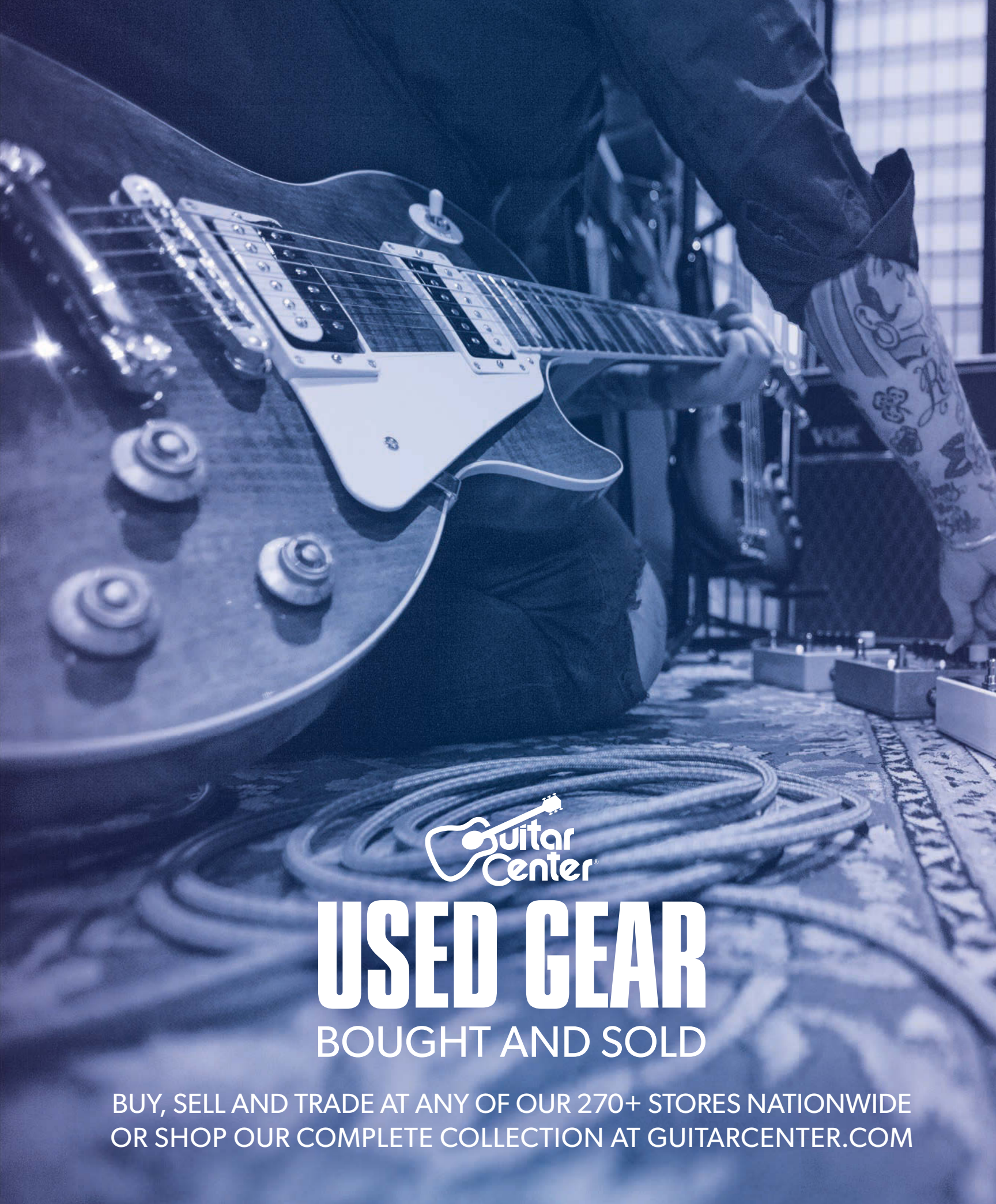
Mesa/Boogie Subway Ultra-Lite 1x12

$649 street
mesaboogie.com

Tones	4.5
Versatility	4
Build/Design	4.5
Value	3.5

PROS Excellent projection and superb volume. Very light and well built.

CONS Pricey.


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PREMIER GEAR

DR. Z
Z-Lux

By Barry Cleveland

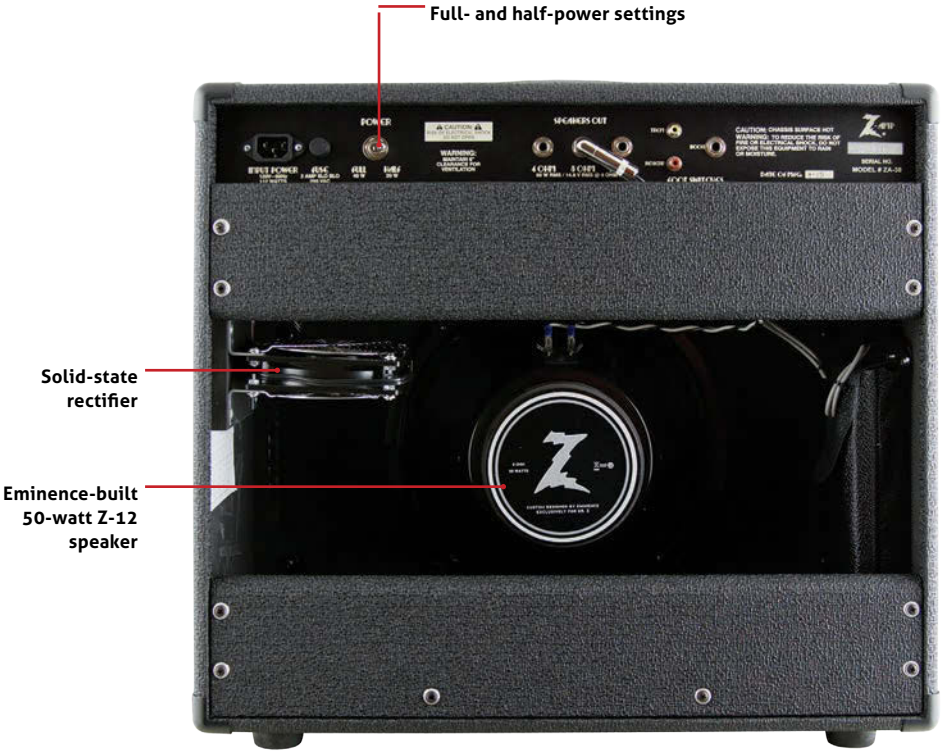
Judging from its name, one might reasonably expect the Z-Lux to be yet another emulation of a certain legendary Fender amplifier, but that narrow classification doesn't do it justice. This contemporary 40-watt combo (also available as a head) may be rooted in the past, but it brings a wider range of capabilities to the stage or studio than most classic tweed-style amps—not the least being considerably more clean volume.

ZNA

The Z-Lux combines the characteristics of several existing Dr. Z amps with new twists. It marries the front end of a MAZ Reverb with the quad 6V6 power section of a Remedy, while providing a half/full power switch like the one found on the discontinued JAZ 20/40. There's also a robust tremolo section and a built-in boost that bypasses the tone stack and gently gooses the gain. Boost and tremolo/reverb footswitches are included.

The Z-Lux is meticulously hand-wired using premium components with tasty touches such as specially selected Mallory 150, Sprague "Orange Drop," and hand-rolled Jupiter caps. Four 12AX7s, a 12AT7, and a solid-state rectifier complement the four 6V6s. An "American voiced" Eminence-built 50-watt Z-12 speaker and a newly designed lightweight cabinet complete





the stylish and transport-friendly, 42-pound package.

I tested the Z-Lux using a 1969 Gibson Les Paul Custom loaded with 1959 PAFs, a PRS Custom 24 Brazilian, and a mid-'70s Fender Stratocaster.

Special Effects

The Z-Lux's tube-driven tremolo and spring reverb are both chockablock with vintage vibe. The tremolo controls offer generously wide sweeps: Speed takes you from a languorous crawl to trippy rapidity, while depth is adjustable from hardly noticeable to maximum throb. The gorgeous reverb sound is rich and clear, with more than enough splash factor for most purposes, though it stops a few drops short of Dick Dale-grade saturation when cranked.

The only concern I encountered is that both effects *can* get a little noisy, particularly when turned up. This poses more of a problem when recording than performing live, but bears mentioning.

Cool Sounds All Around

The beautifully voiced treble, mid, and bass controls (arranged in that order, from left to right) provide an unusually broad range of tone-sculpting options, and all of the sounds within that range are wholly useable—even extreme settings.

For example, rolling the mid control all the way back and maxing out the bass and treble controls resulted in great rhythm tones, especially with single-coils. Conversely, maxing out the mid control and rolling back the bass and treble controls, when combined with the neck pickup on my Les Paul, yielded an edgy—but not *too* edgy—tone that fit perfectly into a busy mix with a narrow opening in the midrange.

The point is that no matter how I fiddled with the tone controls, I couldn't get a truly bad sound out of the Z-Lux. And there's lots of leeway for getting a great one.

Z Train to Trad Town

Needless to say, traditional tones abound. In fact, the Z-Lux's wonderfully warm and luscious clean sound, gradual gradations of grittiness, and nuanced breakup made it easy to dial in classic rock, blues, jazz, and country tones. One minute I was Scotty Moore, the next Muddy Waters, the next Wes Montgomery, and the next Chet Atkins.

It's not a high gain machine. Even with the volume control cranked and the boost engaged, the overdrive wasn't sufficient to carry me into Tony Iommi territory, though with the help of a boost pedal I got close, which brings me to one of the combo's other significant virtues.

The Z-Lux's abundant headroom and clarity make it a superb choice for those who prefer to get their dirtier sounds from stompboxes and for pedal enthusiasts in general. My Pete Cornish P-2 fuzz sang like crazy, the modulation effects in my Eventide H-9 shimmered gloriously, the old-school repeats from a Catalinbread Echorec sounded heavenly, and even the sub-bass rumble of an Electro-Harmonix Micro POG didn't faze the Z.

Verdict

The Dr. Z Z-Lux delivers just about everything you could want in an amp of its type—in a compact package, at a reasonable price. It is loud enough to play small rooms with the power switch set to full, quiet enough for home and studio use with it set to half, and the tone remains consistent when you switch between them. The good doctor has once again delivered a winner. PG

PG PREMIERGuitar PREMIER GEAR

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this amp at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Dr. Z Z-Lux

$2,399 street
drzamps.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Solidly built yet relatively lightweight. Classic 1x12 sounds and more with lots of power. Plays well with effects.

CONS Great-sounding reverb could make more waves. Reverb and tremolo are somewhat noisy. Footswitches pop occasionally.

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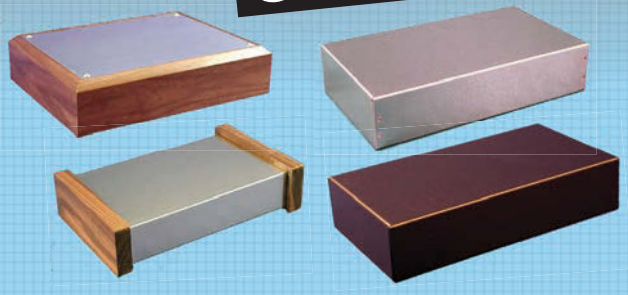


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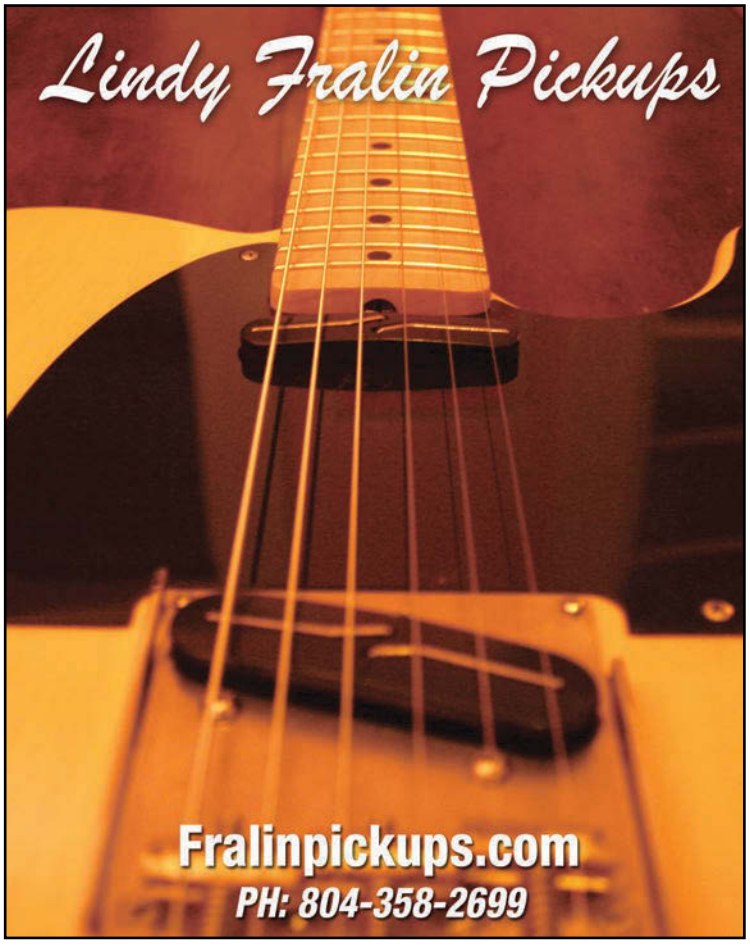
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MOJO HAND FX
El Guapo

By Charles Saufley



Once upon a time—not so long ago—fuzz was regarded in certain quarters as downright sleazy. Never mind that the effect helped shape classy sounding mega-million sellers from *Dark Side of the Moon* to the Isley Brothers' "Summer Breeze." By the late '70s fuzz was held in low esteem—the essence of everything trashy, regressive, and vulgar. And whether you used a Fuzz Face, Tone Bender, or something more crude and terrifying, you huddled with fellow sleazoids in loose clans of outcasts and deviants.

Then a strange thing happened. Fuzz found favor again. And factions within those ranks of weirdoes began to appear. Suddenly "civilized" fuzz cultists (generally favoring smooth, germanium-derived vintage tones) sang the praises of the "few true" fuzz pedals with aristocratic tones and nose-upturned postures more associated with brandy aficionados. What Mojo Hand Fx has given us in the form of El Guapo is a shape shifting, variable-voltage, silicon fuzz that could potentially bridge the divide between the (yuck) connoisseurs and the outsiders that relish sputtering, sick, and more perverse fuzz cacophony.

Moon Indigo Madness

El Guapo is indeed handsome. A lot of fuzz box graphics have become mind-numbingly over the top in recent years. That's cool. But there is something refreshingly imaginative, absurd, and Dadaist about a burro peeking from behind the "O" and an upturned sombrero emitting bolts of lightning that surround the LED.

It's handsome on the inside, too. The surprisingly simple circuit is neatly arrayed on a flawlessly populated PCB. The I/O and 9V jacks are board-mounted, but the whole unit is so sturdy and sound it's hard to imagine this being a problem. You also have the option to power the pedal with a 9V battery.

From Uptown to the Gutter

El Guapo is deceptively complex, so it isn't the easiest fuzz to decipher or understand fluently. The controls are highly interactive and, individually, can seem extraordinarily sensitive. But they each have great range and make creating sounds and textures fun and rewarding if you have a little patience. And as much as the pedal invites (and occasionally requires) attentive tinkering, it's easy to get great sounds—especially with a smaller tube amp running on the aggressive side of its sweet spot. Just about any setting with all four controls in the vicinity of noon will drive your amp into a cool overdriven zone.

Much has been made of El Guapo's abilities as an overdrive. And while it's certainly capable of nice low-gain drive tones, that isn't the pedal's strongest suit. Low-output humbuckers that can add a touch of color in the low-mid range are the best fit for this application and a great match for El Guapo in general. Single coils fare less well, and tend to sound relatively brittle and one dimensional—particularly if you use guitar volume dynamics to clean up your signal. That said, you can coax some pretty sweet low-gain lead tones from a Stratocaster if you soften your guitar tone and set the pedal's effective cut control in a spot that suits your amp.

Mid-gain tones start to highlight the sweetest facets of El Guapo's voice and the interactive possibilities of the gain, starve, and cut controls. Players frustrated with the limitations of vintage fuzzes like Fuzz Faces and Tone Benders (which sometimes require maxed-out gain settings to get the best sounds) will be delighted at how deliciously fuzzy El Guapo sounds with the gain control well left of noon. With small amps in particular, gain settings in the 10-to-2 o'clock range sound especially sweet and bigger than life. Bigger amps will happily take a bit more gain, but also sound huge and buzzy in the mid-gain zone. This adds up to a lot of fuzz colors and moods.

Variable voltage controls aren't new. They're a common mod among Fuzz Face-style circuit tweakers and a big part of what makes ZVEX's Fuzz Factory so delightfully bonkers. El Guapo's take on the voltage starvation concept, however, yields many unique textures. Dramatic octave effects can be achieved by turning the gain and starve controls way up and adding extra high end with the cut control. Tweaking the cut control and your guitar tone and volume can generate even wilder, sputtering, gated and ring modulator-style effects.

The Verdict

The magic of Mojo Hand's El Guapo is how readily it dwells in the worlds of the crude *and* the well mannered. The interactive and sensitive tone and voltage controls are effective and beg for experimentation. And the gain control offers enough shades of fuzz to suit everything from clear, stinging Fuzz Face fare to scuzzier, more demented garage punk filth. This versatility makes it easy to imagine El Guapo as a studio MVP—the kind of superstar, situationally flexible fuzz that can re-shape the personality of a song or riff entirely. And while its copious quirks might make it less easy to use as a primary fuzz in performance, the possibilities of unleashing a rabid El Guapo as contrast to more conventional fuzz tones are positively delicious to consider.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

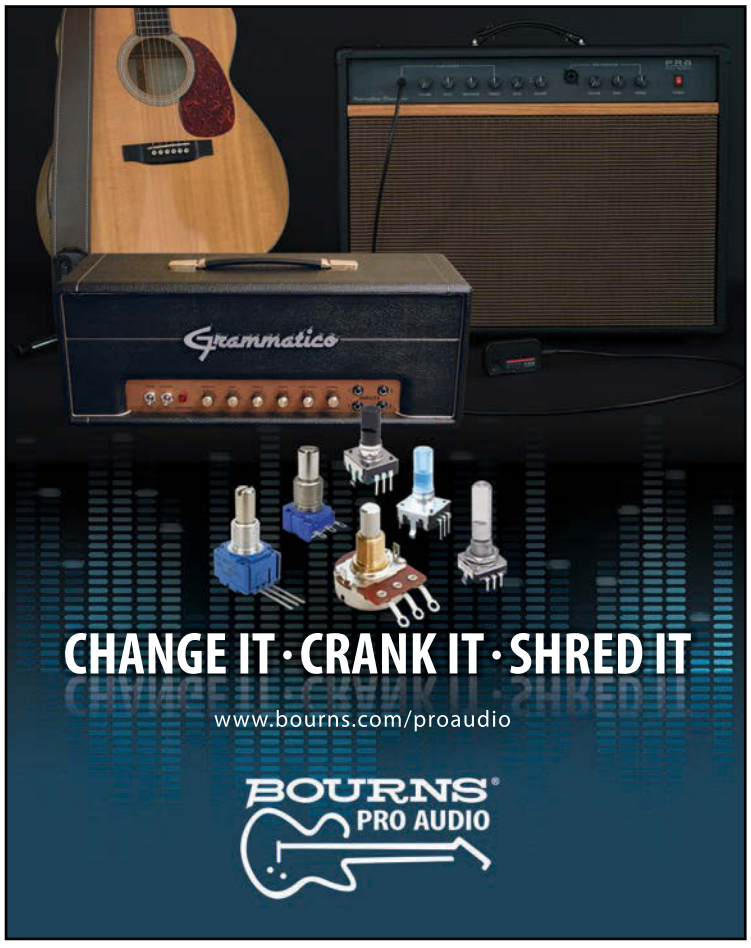
Mojo Hand FX El Guapo

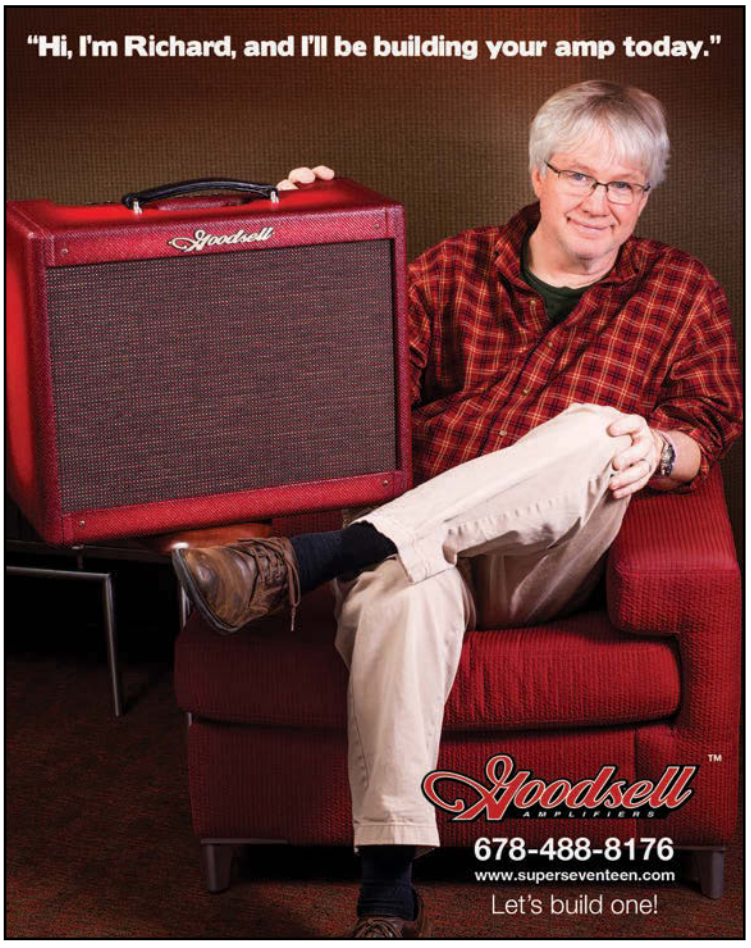
$175 street
mojohandfx.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	4
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4

PROS Surprising range of fuzz colors. Dynamic, interactive cut and voltage-starve controls. Great with small amps. Huge studio potential.

CONS Low-gain drive tones can sound thin with single-coils.






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SE A15AL Alex Lifeson

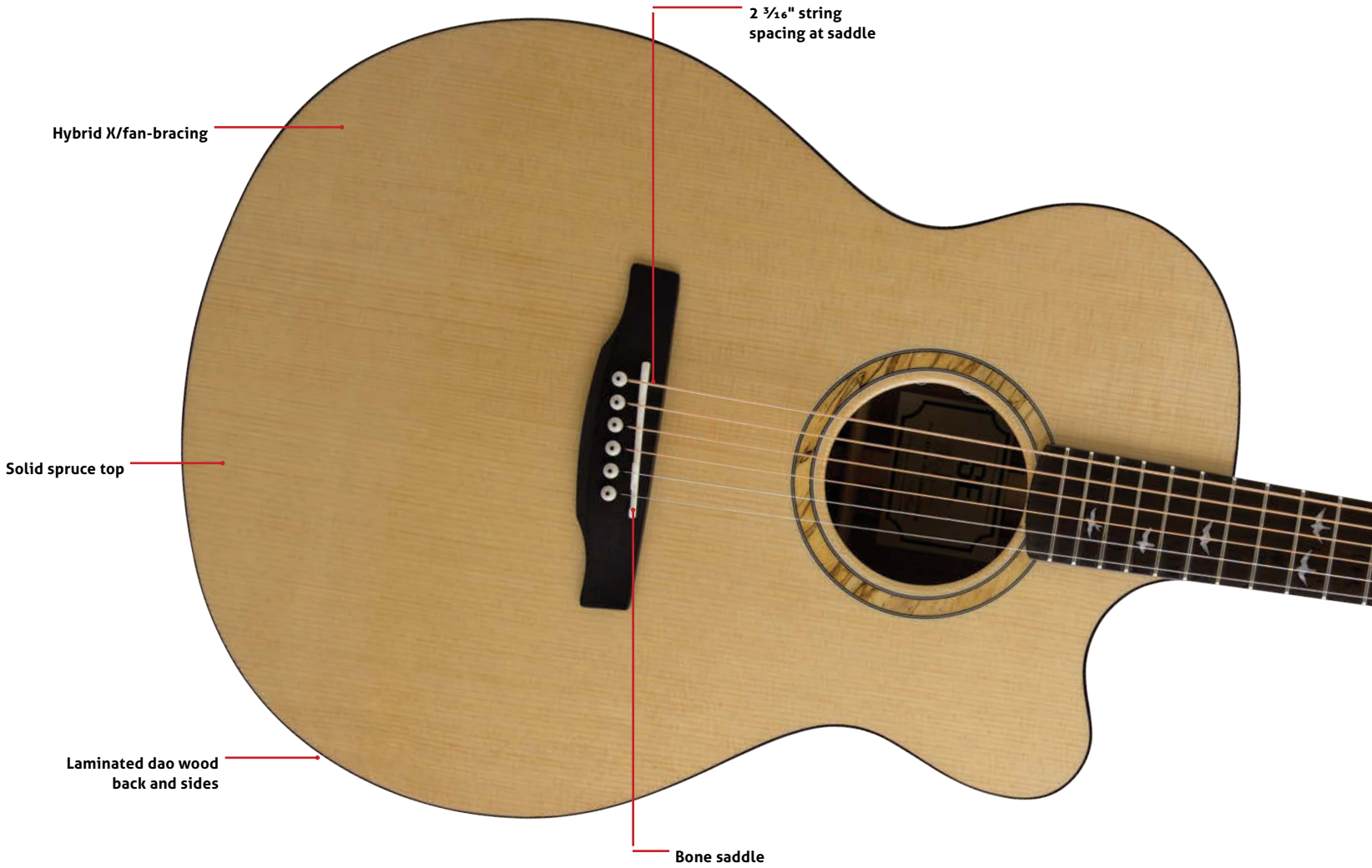
By Adam Perlmutter

In both electric and acoustic incarnations, Paul Reed Smith's SE guitars have typically been wickedly good combinations of price and performance. The electric SE line is even home to some very nice artist signature instruments. But the A15AL Alex Lifeson Thinline, an SE version of the Rush guitarist's signature Private Stock Angelus acoustic, is the first signature SE acoustic. It's pretty, fast playing, and comfortable. And while it's not as loud or powerful as many flattops its size, it's responsive and an excellent platform for fast, nimble-fingered fretboard expressions.

A Winning Player

About 10 years ago, Paul Reed Smith had an "a-ha" moment. He had tried a century-old nylon-string made by Antonio de Torres. Floored by the guitar's volume and bass response, the famously curious and design-minded Smith wondered what nylon-string construction methods he could borrow to make better steel-strings.

Smith combined aspects of the Torres fan bracing array and steel-string X-bracing. The bracing pattern became one of the



foundations of PRS's steel-string flat top design—from the high-end models made in the company's custom shop in its Maryland factory to the affordable SE line—including the Alex Lifeson model.

The first thing you'll probably notice about the Lifeson, however, is not the sonic subtleties of hybrid bracing, but how well it plays. The neck has a deep, substantial but comfortable C shape, and a relatively narrow nut, 1 21/32", gives it the streamlined feel of an electric guitar that makes thumb-fretted chord shapes easy. The generous string spacing at the saddle, 2 3/16", offsets the narrow spacing at the nut to some degree and keeps things from feeling too cramped.

The action on our test guitar was just about perfect—low enough to make barre chords feel effortless and facilitate high-velocity soloing and even whole-step bends. Players accustomed to traditional steel-string guitars might even find the Lifeson Thinline a little *too* easy to play. But as fast and low as the action felt, the guitar never buzzed. This set up was very well done.

The neck's comfort is echoed in the body's sleek and slim design. The lower bout is 15 ½" inches wide, a half inch wider than Martin's OM, and at its deepest, the body is 3 ⅞" thick, compared to 4 ⅛" on an OM or 4 ⅞" on a Martin dreadnought. It feels great to cradle the guitar, especially in a seated position.

Luxurious Detailing

Design and execution are, predictably, excellent. PRS fans will appreciate the signature Bird in Flight fretboard inlays. Other details, like the wooden rosette and tortoise binding, heel cap, and end strip, lend extra elegance. The wood selection—a solid Sitka spruce top, mahogany neck, and laminated dao back and sides, complement each other beautifully.

Fretwork is every bit as clean as what you'd see on a US-made PRS. The slotting on the bone nut and saddle are super precise. The poly finish, while uniformly applied, does feel a little extreme in its glossiness. It's perhaps the only outward indicator of the Lifeson's more-affordable origins.

Slimmer Means Thinner

The Lifeson Thinline's svelte shape does mean a few sacrifices on the sonic side of the equation—at least if you favor burly, bassy dreadnought-style tones. The midrange tones are rich and shimmering, but the bass response could be stronger.

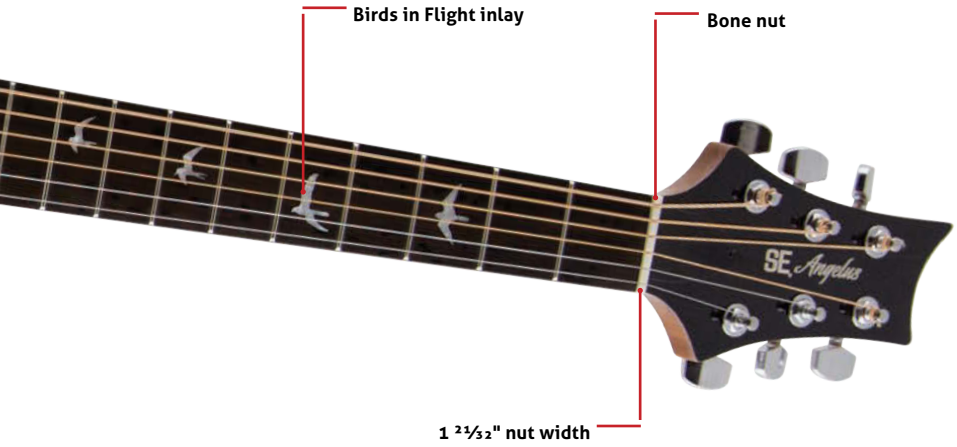
Then again, if you take a stab at the arpeggios that open Rush's "Closer to the Heart" (originally played on a 12-string), you can hear how the guitar's tone profile would work for a player with aims akin to Lifeson's. Clarity and note separation are excellent. I could certainly hear the payoff from PRS's hybrid bracing while playing the instrumental section that opens "The Trees" (originally played on a nylon-string). The notes cascaded together beautifully and the guitar is very responsive to fret-hand nuance. And while the string spacing at the nut isn't ideal for complex chord shapes, the wider spacing at the saddle makes fingerpicking easy.

Plugged into a Fender Acoustasonic with the amp's tone controls set flat, the Lifeson isn't exactly dazzling. The midrange feels pronounced at the expense of low-end presence and high-end detail. As such, the Lifeson probably isn't balanced enough across the frequency spectrum for solo performance. On the other hand, it's easy to imagine this guitar being a perfect fit for a rock band situation—nestling just right between bass and kick drum, and vocals and lead guitar.

The Verdict

PRS's SE A15AL Alex Lifeson Thinline is a stylish and immaculately executed guitar, boasting top-notch playability. It might not have the most inspiring voice, acoustically or amplified, but it sounds good and feels great in rock and ensemble contexts. And its performance potential in this role is likely very much what the guitar's namesake had intended and something his acolytes will appreciate.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this acoustic at premierguitar.com/mar2016



RATINGS

Paul Reed Smith SE A15AL Alex Lifeson

$799 street
prsguitars.com

Tones	
Playability	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Smartly designed and well built. Insanely playable. Perfect set up.

CONS Not the best value for a guitar with laminated back and sides. Bass and treble response could be better.

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PREMIER GEAR

DUSKY
D_2O

By Joe Gore

Not to take anything away from ambitious amps with multiple channels, high-octane preamps, and complex tone stacks, but it's tough to beat the tactile response and sonic immediacy of a simple signal path populated with high-quality parts.

The new D_2O from North Carolina's Dusky Electronics is a stellar example of doing lots with less. Dusky says the amp's name alludes to the chemical symbol for the heavy water used in nuclear reactors, and was chosen because the amp can sound both heavy and clear. It certainly does—and in cool and unusual ways.



A Fresh, Clean Look

I tested D_2O with Dusky's Hydrogen Cab ($575, sold separately)—a 1x12 with a ceramic Warehouse G12C/S speaker. With their coordinated orange/sky-blue color scheme, the head and cab look fab together. Their cheery colors could have been inspired by a 1960s detergent box—or a pop artist's interpretation of one. And then there's that wild front-panel cutout—back lit by LEDs.

Lacking reverb or tremolo, the D_2O is comparatively no-frills. And the head's two 6L6 power tubes evoke such '60s Fender amps as the Bassman, Bandmaster, and Super. (According to Dusky, you can substitute EL34, KT88, or 6550 power tubes with no modifications, though I only evaluated the amp with its stock Russian-made Tung-Sol tubes.) Meanwhile, the preamp tubes are 6SL7s—octal models that fell out of general use during the '50s. The amp's paraphase-style phase inverter circuit (most associated, perhaps, with Fender tweed circuits) is even more primitive. But while various D_2O design details are plucked from the guitar amp's early history, the resulting tones feel edgy and modern.

Far from Fender

The 32-watt D_2O is about as loud as most dual-6L6 Fender blackface amps, though its tone profile is quite different. Compared to, say, a '60s Super, D_2O distorts more readily and at relatively low volumes. The distortion's character is different, too, with crackling upper-mid crunch reminiscent of vintage Vox



"Tones are deep, intense, and grounded, with gobs of harmonious sustain."

amps, even when listening through the Hydrogen Cab's American-style speaker. D_2O has less clean headroom than an equivalently powered blackface, but between the harmonious distortion and crisp definition, your clean parts may sound great a little dirtier than usual. The frequency range is extraordinary. Lows are powerful yet tight. (D_2O actually works nicely as a retro-style bass amp.) Highs can be as intense as you want, and then some.

Expanded frequency range isn't always a good thing. With extra highs and lows, your tones can start to sound as if they were recorded directly. Fortunately, D_2O boasts a novel set of tone controls uniquely suited to wrangling the amp's potentially overwhelming lows and highs. The bass and treble controls in the first preamp stage are configured Baxandall or "James"-style, a relatively little-used circuit capable of *serious* high and low boosts. Meanwhile, the mid control is isolated from the bass/treble controls in the second preamp stage. It's a cut-only control that siphons off the low mids that accumulate when you crank the bass control. Finally, there's a high-cut control located in the power amp stage.

In other words, the tone controls require you to work via both addition and subtraction. There's no "right" way to proceed, but I found it helpful to start with approximate bass and treble levels before setting the gain (because the amount of added highs and lows affects the degree and character of distortion). At this point, tones may be excessively boomy or brittle, but you can tame top-end nastiness with the cut control, and then adjust the mid control for the right balance of bulk and clarity. All settings are supremely dynamic. If you like, you can simply crank the amp's volume and control the distortion amount via your guitar's volume knob.

No matter how you set the controls, tones are deep and intense, with gobs of harmonious sustain. Thanks in part to D_2O's big-ass, U.S.-made Edcor transformers, the amp always sounds authoritative, with ultra-present highs and rock-solid fundamentals. D_2O also works splendidly with gain/distortion stompboxes (like the homemade germanium booster heard 40 seconds into the demo clip).

Pretty on the Inside

D_2O is beautifully built. The head's folded-steel exterior is tough and attractive. The head weighs a sensible 27 pounds and has two rugged metal handles. You can access the tubes by removing just four screws, which takes all of 30 seconds. It only takes a minute or two to expose the full-sized, modern components inside the chassis. These are meticulously hand-soldered on turret board. It's easy to imagine D_2O sounding great decades from now.

The rear panel includes a 3-way speaker impedance selector and a switch that reduces power to 8 watts. Quiet mode sounds every bit as good as loud mode, with little of the "veiled" quality you sometimes get from, say, speaker attenuators. (My demo clips were recorded in low-power mode.)

The Verdict

With D_2O, Dusky Electronics has pillaged the past to create something new. The amp offers wide-ranging tones with virile lows, face-slapping presence, and superb dynamic response. The $1,500 price tag is sensible for such an expertly crafted, hand-wired head with a fresh, fun look and so many high-impact tones.

PG PREMIERGuitar PREMIER GEAR

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this amp at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Dusky D_2O

$1,500 street
(cabinet $575, sold separately)
duskyamp.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	5
Value	4

PROS Unique design. Bold, tactile tones. Great touch response. Excellent build quality.

CONS No reverb or tremolo.

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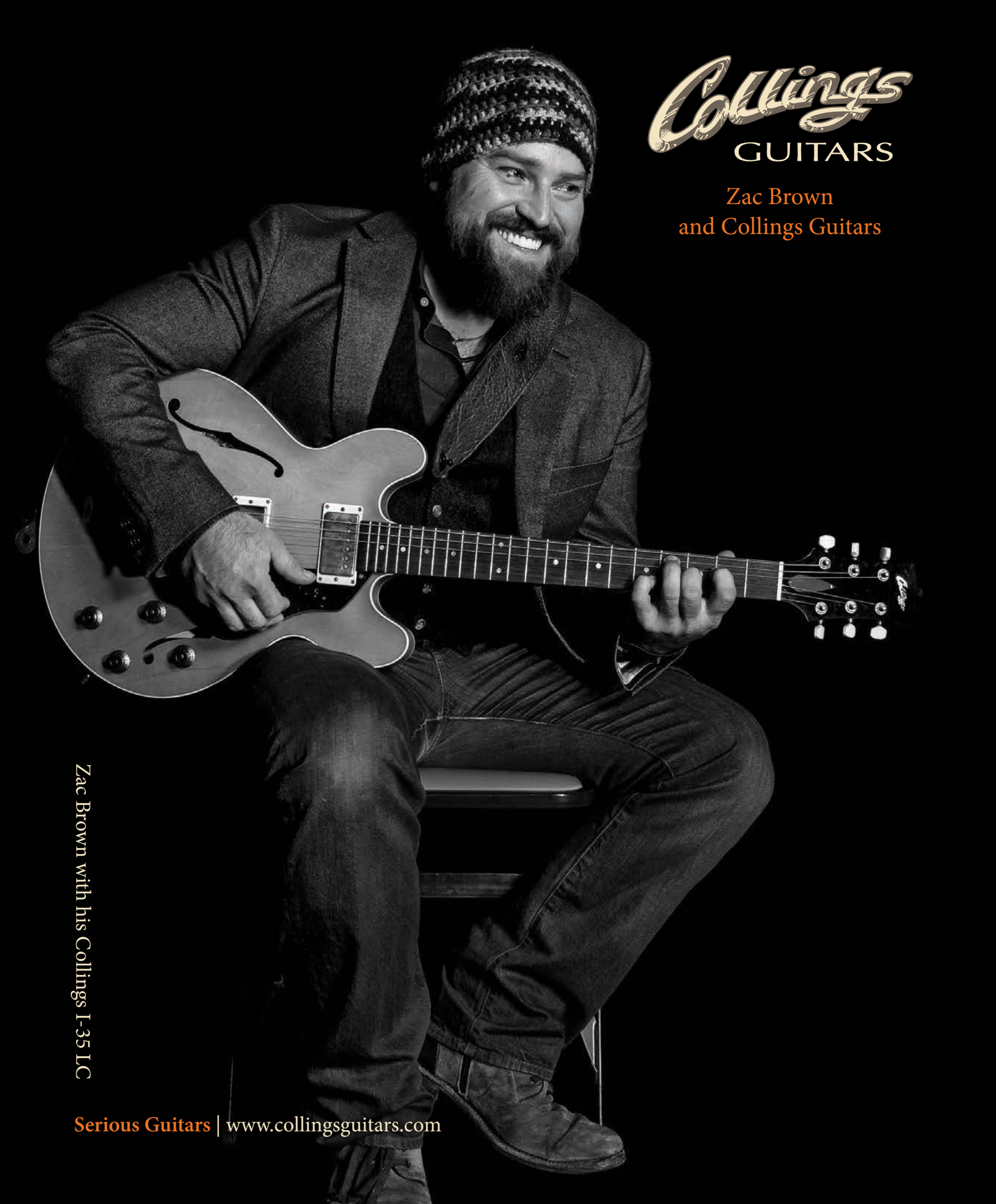
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ACOUSTIC BN6210

By Jon D'Auria

In their 40-plus years in the amp-building business, Acoustic has as celebrated a backstory as any company of its kind. Originating in Los Angeles as the Acoustic Control Corporation in the late '60s, the company became the prized name in amps suited to power the arena-sized venues that were becoming increasingly popular at the time. So much so that members of bass royalty like Jaco Pastorius, John Paul Jones, Larry Graham, John McVie, and many others relied on Acoustic Control Corporation rigs to help sculpt their legendary tones.

Fast-forward to today and Acoustic's recent launch of the Class D/Neo Series group of bass amps, cabs, and combos that bring pro tone and aesthetically hip designs. Perhaps one of the most interesting items born to the series is the BN6210 combo, which boasts big power that belies its compact package. Beyond power, the BN6210 offers tone-customization galore.

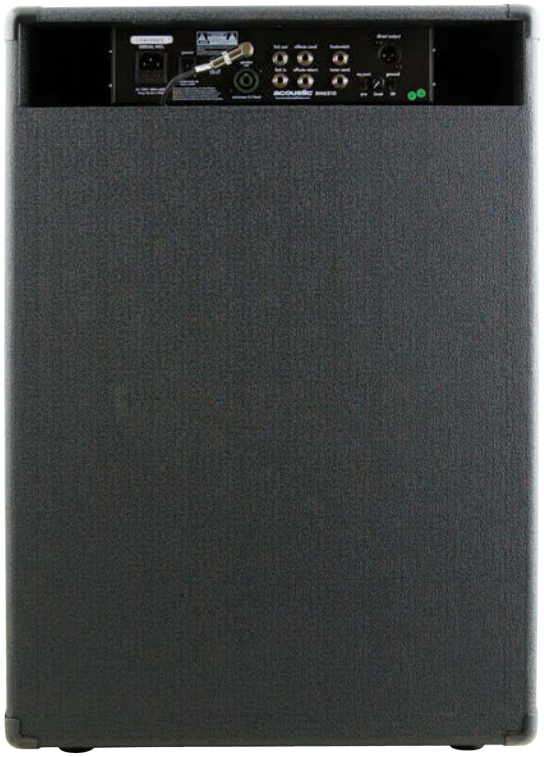
Portable Power, Infinite Customization

One of the main focuses in designing the BN6210 was to keep the weight of the combo down for the utmost portability. The plywood enclosure houses two neodymium 10" speakers that are 40 percent lighter than their ceramic-magnet cousins, bringing the BN6210 to just a hair under 60 pounds—a manageable weight that should assist in back-grief prevention during load ins and outs. But don't judge an amp by its enclosure. This class-D combo is all about power, with its 600 watts of wall-shaking punch.

Unlike some other 2x10 combos in its class, the BN6210 offers a wealth of tone-tweaking tools to achieve the sound you're after and thoughtful features for various playing situations. There's the 6-band graphic EQ that's engaged at the touch of a button, built-in Acousti-Comp compression, an overdrive section, super-lo and super-hi frequency boost switches, a notch enabler switch for mid-range scooping, and a -10 dB pad switch to for use with active basses/high-output pickups.

The back panel is just as well equipped. It houses an XLR direct out, output-level knob, pre/post EQ switch, a ground-lift switch, footswitch jack, tuner send, effects





send/return, and a link in/out for use with another head as a slave/master.

With so many bells and whistles to dig into, I eagerly plugged in a trusty Fender American Precision Deluxe to give the amp a go with a passive bass. Starting out with the EQ set flat, I was impressed right away with the level of note clarity. Each note up and down the neck was equally pronounced, and projected with booming sharpness. The amp pushes a notable amount of air and reached some impressive depths for a pair of 10" speakers, while the punchiness of the highs made playing in upper registers equally moving.

Before activating the 6-band EQ switch, I set the EQ levels to a typical "U" shape with the lows and highs topping off around 75 percent and the mids curving down to about 25 percent. I tested several variations with the sliders, and the 6-band EQ showed its worth for precise tone tweaking. The front panel also features low, high, and notch dials that ultimately serve the same function as the graphic EQ, but with quicker adjustability on the fly.

Each note up and down the neck was equally pronounced and projected with booming sharpness.

Variations in Tone

The super-lo, super-hi, and notch enable switches are excellent options for quick sound shifting through the touch of a button. Engaging the super-lo added a low-frequency boost of 3 dB at 40 Hz that enhanced the deep end and immersed my tone with rich lows, while the super-hi's 2 dB boost at 7 kHz provided a dose of brightness that was great for soloing higher up on the neck. The notch enable button—and its accompanying dial for maneuvering the notch-filter frequency—proved to be the most diverse and dynamic of the three switches by filling out the body of the tone from the center out for the entirety of the bass.

When I activated the Acousti-Comp switch, it added a nice—albeit light—level of compression that didn't overly dry out or weaken the tone. Nope, it's not going to replace a top-flight compression pedal, but will have you covered in a pinch when you need a little squeeze. The onboard compressor was most useful when playing heavily in the midrange or aggressively using a pick.

The BN6210's overdrive section consists of an on/off switch and dials for blend and gain levels to fine-tune the amount of grit. With the low, high, and notch knobs all set to noon, I rolled the overdrive to 2 o'clock and kept the blend at 50/50. The overdrive tone was a *little* thin with this setting, but pushing the low and notch dials to about 2 o'clock gave the overdrive the bottom it needed. Balls-to-the-wall distortion isn't on tap here, but the overdrive section of this versatile combo is a handy tool for mustering up some respectable grind for those heavier moments.

The Verdict

The Acoustic BN6210 is a powerful, solid combo with a wonderland of tone-shaping tools. Its sound is booming and clear, and the amp is portable and light enough to take to just about any gig. Players who want a simple control set they don't have to fuss with might want to opt for a more basic combo. But when you consider all the sonic-sculpting options and the many tone junkies who love to tweak and craft their tone from the ground up, the compact BN6210 combo could be an ideal pairing.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this amp at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Acoustic BN6210

$749 street
acousticamplification.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	4.5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4.5

PROS Lightweight and powerful. Highly customizable tone shaping. Ready to sub for a much larger rig.

CONS A little pricey for a combo, even with all the options. Overdrive lacks a little in the grit department.

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THORPY FX
Muffroom Cloud

By Charlie Saufley

I'm an Anglophile about many things. But even if I was unencumbered by such cultural leanings, I'd venture that the stompbox makers of Albion have been on fire of late. One of the best of the bunch is Adrian Thorpe and the pedal-making concern he calls Thorpy FX. We last checked in with Thorpy when we reviewed the Gunshot in our October 2015 issue. Like a lot of pedal spotters, we were knocked out by how complete the Gunshot was as a stompbox—from the design to the construction to the expansive sound shaping power of the thing.

As the name less-than-obliquely suggests, the Muffroom Cloud is Thorpe's head-on charge at the populous Muff clone realm. Yet even in that very cramped corner of the fuzz cosmos, the Muffroom Cloud stands apart in terms of quality, tone, and the sound sculpting power of its impressive, interactive tone and gain sections. And while it's derived from an early "Triangle" Muff circuit, its expansive, malleable voice readily spans huge sonic swaths of the Muff's history from "Triangle" to the "Ram's Head" to the Sovtek years and beyond.

Built to Blast

The laser-engraved stainless steel and international orange Muffroom, which uses the same enclosure as the other pedals in the Thorpy line, is a cool synthesis of '60s fuzz chic (a chunky, steel, slope-front enclosure with chicken head knobs) and more contemporary industrial design elements. None of the design is frivolous, however. The pedal is actually more compact than it looks in pictures—about a ¼" wider and just an inch longer than a standard Boss pedal. The bored steel sections keep you from kicking the knobs out of place. The sturdy Neutrik I/O jacks and 9V DC jack are situated on the top of the pedal, lending a clean, streamlined look and saving pedalboard space.

You open up the enclosure via four hex bolts on the side. And if the cool exterior doesn't sell you on Thorpe's exacting sense of craft, the guts of the Muffroom will. The circuit board is immaculately wired. I can't recall seeing a cleaner one. Although the copious capacitors and four-transistor layout scream "Muff" right away, there is a modern watchmaker's sense of precision and execution that suggests evolution beyond the Muff's time-tested circuit. And even though the tone shaping circuit makes the Thorpy slightly more complex than the average Muff clone, it looks beautifully simple and ordered.

Sonic Megatonnage

You could set the knobs on the Thorpy just about anywhere and hear the pedal's fat, unmistakable "Muffiness" immediately. But the differences between the Thorpy and an average Muff become apparent nearly as fast. One of the most profound differences between the Thorpy and Muffs from across the family tree is its ability to stay articulate in high-gain chording situations.



Sabbathoid I-V chords growled with throaty complexity that highlighted overtones and revealed a lot of the guitar's intrinsic voice. But even pitch-bended, blurry Kevin Shields chords with ringing open strings and odd intervals retained harmonic intricacy as overtones mingled and mutated with tremolo bar dives. This is no mean feat for the best Big Muffs, but what's more remarkable is that the Thorpy delivers all this articulation and detail without sacrificing the warm, wooly bigness that makes Muffs perfect for desert rock riffs and singing, sustained leads.

Some of the ability to straddle the detail versus dynamite divide comes via the Thorpy's unique compressed quality. It's much more amp-like than the leaden compression that Muffs typically generate at high volume and gain settings—which is to say, it's a lot airier and much more responsive and dynamic. Some of this may be down to the fact that the Thorpy is a just a little bit quieter than many Muffs at full tilt. Our test Muffroom Cloud was quieter than an original green Sovtek and "Civil War" and "Ram's Head" clones, but still decidedly on the deafening side of the spectrum. And if relative lack of volume is initially a source of anxiety, you soon realize that the extra note articulation

makes the extra volume a lot less necessary. The Thorpy reveals a lot about how nuance and nimbleness can trounce brute strength—a trick not often observed nor savored in the Muff universe.

Don't Need No Whip, Just Equalize!

A lot of the Thorpy's extra-articulate voice comes via use of the splendidly executed EQ section. Many Muff clones use a midrange control to add presence. But the Thorpy's more amp-like bass/treble controls are arguably much more effective at the task, and you can pinpoint very specific stops along the EQ spectrum using the two knobs together. One of my favorite, if less common, uses for a Muff is using maximum-gain/low-volume/high-treble settings to conjure raspy biker fuzz tones. At these settings the Thorpy generates a gloriously scuzzy, buzzy voice. But the bass/treble control can really help hone this sound—enabling everything from a hollowed-out Tone Bender wallop to raspy, sustained Fuzzrite or Bosstone style buzz.

Guitar volume control dynamics are better than many Muffs, but, on balance, rather typical of the breed. You won't be going from fuzzy to clean with a flick of the pinky—more like fuzzy to slightly less fuzzy to thin and raspy to inaudible.

The Verdict

In terms of design and sheer robustness, the Muffroom Cloud is nearly impossible to top. But it's also one of the most unique, versatile, and musically practical Muffs you'll ever encounter. While it's expensive, the superb quality makes it hard to quibble with the price—especially given what vintage Muff specimens and even some lesser boutique versions command these days. And apart from the budget constrained and players with an insatiable need to have the loudest pedal in five counties, it's hard to imagine a fuzz fanatic that won't be twitching at the prospect of a turn with this new contender for Alpha Muff.

PG PREMIER Guitar PREMIER GEAR

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/mar2016

RATINGS

Thorpy FX Muffroom Cloud

$290 street
thorpyfx.com

Tones	♥♥♥♥♥
Ease of Use	♥♥♥♥♡
Build/Design	♥♥♥♥♥
Value	♥♥♥♥♡

PROS Incredibly articulate and detailed for a Muff clone. Detailed and airy in high-gain applications. Unique compression voice. Bulletproof and beautifully built.

CONS Might be a touch quiet for fans of the loudest Muffs or for players coaxing maximum attack from smaller amps.







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MESA ENGINEERING

Question & Obsession

Sometimes it takes a bit of patience and determination to figure out a new tone toy. DMA's guitarist Johnny Took joins the PG *staff in discussing the stomps we weren't smitten with at first sight, but later ended up loving.*

Q: *What pedal did you end up loving despite first impressions?*





Johnny Took
DMA's

A: For years I've been trying a bunch of delay pedals—from the big multi-effects units to old-school simple analog ones—in an effort to discover new sounds and get away from the Boss DD-7. My mates used to use them in an early band I was in, so I tried to stay clear, but I ended up folding because they are simple, fluent, and spacious. I like to use the DD-7 as a staple then double up with another weirder pedal for leads or more noise.

Current obsession:
Pete Drake and his talking steel guitar. Drake played pedal steel for Dylan and on George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* and produced a whole bunch of albums in Nashville in the '60s. He also invented what's best described as a vocoder running through a pedal steel. Check out the song called "Forever."





Tony D'Andragora
Reader of the Month

A: My dad got this old MXR Distortion + from a friend and gave it to me. I plugged my guitar into it and hated it. Couldn't find a single configuration I liked. Weeks later I plugged my bass into it and *bam*—perfect bass distortion for punk and metal. Been recording stuff with it ever since.

Current obsession:
DIY musicians/bands/producers. I've been teaching myself to record and mix my own music since college, and guys like Cloudkicker proved to me that it was possible to make professional-sounding music in a bedroom just by practicing and learning from people on the internet.



Bottom left: Photo courtesy of the Pete Drake Music Group



John Bohlinger

Nashville Correspondent

A: I was given an Ibanez Echo Shifter about a year ago. My first thought was, "This takes up *waaaaay* too much real estate on my board." Then when I plugged it in, it sounded like it was broken or wired wrong because the echo quickly went into an earsplitting feedback loop. Eventually, I grew to love how uncontrollable it is. Great for Kirk/Spock-era *Star Trek* sounds.

Current obsession:
Jerry Reed. He played his ass off, wrote incredible songs, including a hit for Elvis, made a bunch of movies with Burt Reynolds (*Gator* remains my favorite), and unironically rocked the trucker hat before anyone other than truckers. He's an American treasure.





Ted Drozdowski

Senior Editor

A: When I got my MW Fuzzytone as a gift, I was grateful—all gear happily accepted!—but skeptical about needing fuzz/OD pedal number 11. But after a couple weeks it edged my TubeScreamer and FuzzFactory off my pedalboard. I became captivated by the richness and depth of its voice, plus its ability to darken, boost, and distort my tone all at once, while increasing presence. This humble little "gray mare" snorts and whinnies just right. It became a cool part of my latest album.

Current obsession:
Tone destruction and sonic expansion ... by any means necessary.





Shawn Hammond

Chief Content Officer

A: The ZVEX Fuzz Factory initially overwhelmed me with both its cryptically named "stab" knob, and the unpredictable way every knob's setting affected other knobs' responsiveness—but the latter is what makes it one of the most flexible fuzzes available.

Current obsession:
The raw glory of a guitar plugged straight into a cranked up, really responsive amp.



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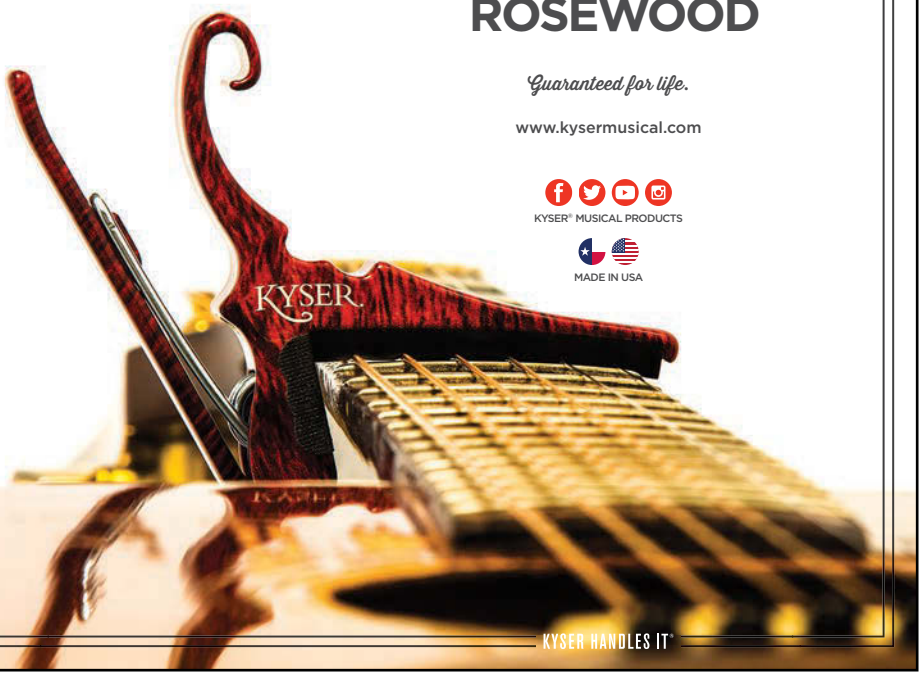
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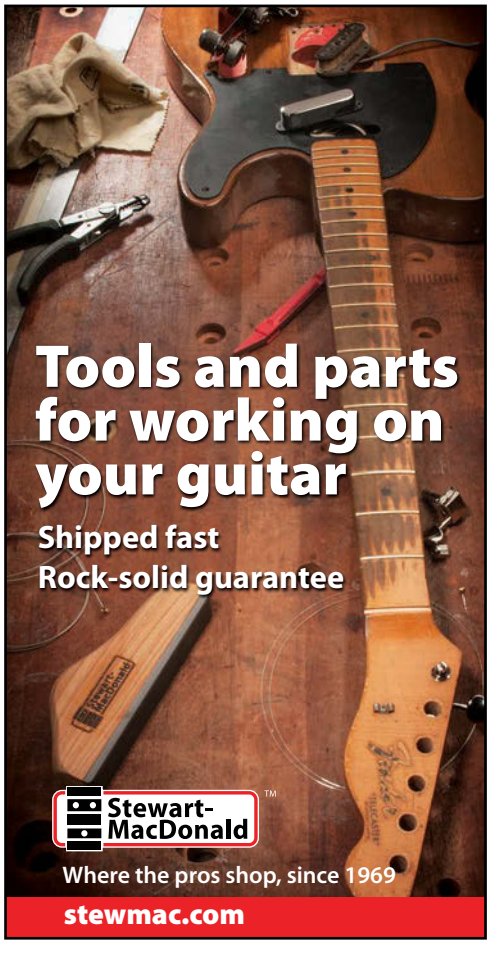
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Reader Pedalboards

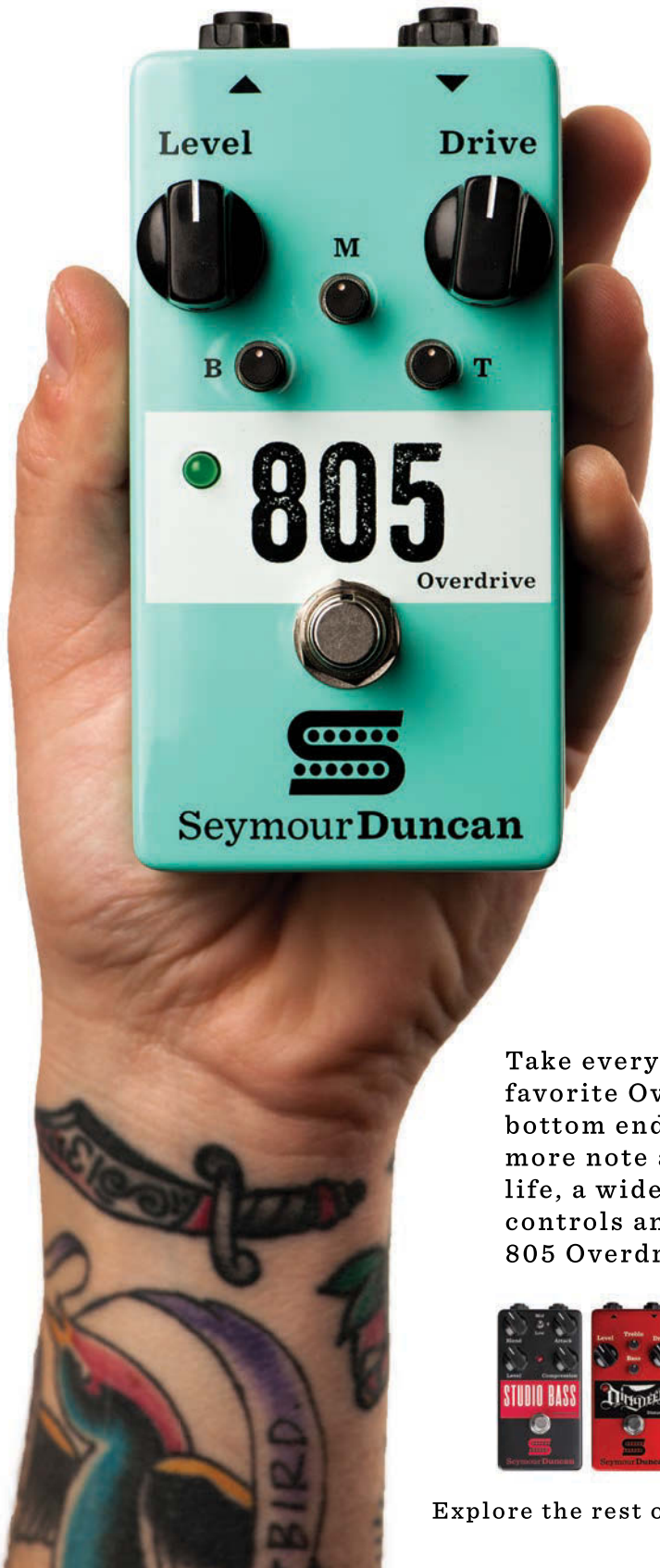


Another year means another chance to show off your pedal playground.

Pedals are universal. As you'll see from these boards assembled by guitarists living across the globe, stomping transcends borders. From Connecticut to California, Canada to Mexico, Portugal to Slovakia, passionate players answered our call to share their prized collection with *PG* tone freaks.

This year's submissions include an obsessive church guitarist, a 6-stringer with a penchant for gothic art, and a board with a sumo wrestler mascot. A few of you even showed us your effects overflow, including a dedicated room for pedals that don't fit on the gig board ... sounds about right!

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CARLOS LOBATO

Short and Sweet

Carlos uses this setup down in Guadalajara, Mexico. His signal chain is as follows: Junkie Tone Booffer (below the Pedaltrain board), Moogerfooger MIDI MuRF MF-105, DOD FX84 Milk Box Compressor, Lovepedal Eternity Roadhouse HW, Pro Co RAT (with JHS Rat Pack mod), ZVEX Fuzzolo, Strymon Mobius, Strymon El Capistan dTape Echo, TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb.

JURAJ ZAUJEC

Bag of Tricks

Juraj is a Slovakian 6-stringer who plays a vintage modified Squier Jaguar in his band Kýbel Mačiek. His board includes a heavily modded Dunlop classic wah, which has a mid mod, gain mod, sweep mod, and amplitude mod. The rest of his toys: a TC Electronic PolyTune Noir, an Electro-Harmonix Pitchfork used with an expression pedal, an Electro-Harmonix Silencer, Razzor Vintage Overdrive in the loop (a 808 clone), a DIY Russian Big Muff, DIY ZVEX Mastotron, ModTone Clean Boost, Ibanez FL9, Electro-Harmonix Small Stone with a volume mod, DIY Tremulus Lune tremolo, and an Electro-Harmonix Memory Toy.





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MICHAEL STIBOR
Blue-Collar Board

"I call this the working man's pedalboard," Michael says. "I didn't pay over $100 for any one pedal (the DD-7 was used)." Top deck: Electro-Harmonix Silencer, Joyo Dyna Compressor, Boss TU-3, Hotone Soul Press (used as a volume pedal).

Bottom Deck: Boss DD-7 Digital Delay, TC Electronic MojoMojo Overdrive, TC Electronic Dark Matter Distortion, and an original Dunlop Cry Baby wah. Everything is powered by a Donner power supply (thus the blue LED lighting from underneath).



ADÁN RUIZ
Stompbox Square

Hailing from Mexico City, Adán says he likes this setup because it's easy to handle and is just right for his guitar needs. Check out the unique pair of distressed Mr. Lion pedals, which are made in Mexico. This equilateral pedalboard contains: a Hotone Soul Press volume/expression/wah, TC Electronic PolyTune 2, Mr. Lion Boost, Mr. Lion Overdrive, Cusack More Louder boost, TC Electronic Flashback Mini Delay, Electro-Harmonix Holy Stain, and an AKG WMS40 Mini wireless system.

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GILBERT AVILA
Pedal Chamber

"I'm honestly very, very, *very* obsessed with guitar pedals! I've been lucky enough to land a job that allows me to indulge a lot more these days—it's one of the healthier addictions to have."

We believe him. Gilbert not only showed us his DIY board made from Ikea shelves, but he also showed us something we don't see every day (though we know a lot of you have them): a pedal "storage room."

The following pedals have made it onto his current board: a Korg Pitchblack tuner, Electro-Harmonix Hog, Malekko Charlie Foxtrot, EarthQuaker Park Fuzz Sound, Heavy Electronics Grind Fuzz, Ibanez Echo Shifter, TC Electronic Alter Ego V2, EarthQuaker Afterneath, TC Electronic Ditto X2, and a Boss RC-20XL. He uses a Visual Sound 1 Spot for juice and wires it all up with Lava Tightrope Gold Plug cables.



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New product

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The MultiSelector AMP is a state of the art unidirectional 1-to-4 instrument amp switcher that silently switches one instrument to multiple amps, with complete isolation between amplifiers. The input is electronically buffered with a 1MegOhm input impedance, which emulates a proper amplifier load and prevents any degradation to the instrument's tone. The signal passes through the MultiSelector AMP transparently, with no coloration and the digitally controlled optical switching is completely silent.



MULTISELECTOR REMOTE

The optional MultiSelector REMOTE "stomp box" style footswitches contains four switches that remotely control the switching functions of the rack mount units using a regular 3-pin XLR microphone cable. A unique, proprietary communication protocol ensures reliable switching with mic cables up to 100 feet long.



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KEVIN SATRE
Open Drawers

Here's what Kevin's got going on in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. "I've built, fiberglassed, wired, and assembled everything," he says. "Through the brains of the Voodoo Lab floor controller and a G Lab LMS-1 line switcher, I'm able to instantly switch between my Tele, Strat, Martin acoustic, and Dobro. Through the wizardry of the GCX switchers, I'm able to switch between amps and loop in all the stompboxes in the rack as well as a vintage Peavey Pro-Fex rack unit."

The stompboxes on his actual board are as follows: a Wampler Hot Wired, Boss DD-20 Giga Delay, Boss RC-30 Loop Station, a Jimi Hendrix Wah (Thomas), a TC-Helicon Voicelive Play GTX (for vocal effects), and last, but not least, an Ernie Ball volume pedal. The whole system works thanks to some 37-pin Syntax connectors and a 40' snake. All of this is wired in between loops and can be accessed at anytime, and a Boss TU-1000 is inline at all times.

Kevin also sent us the details of his rack unit. Drawer 1 has two Wampler Ego Compressors, set at different levels, and a vintage Boss CS-1 for "really squished country." Also in this drawer are a Boss Fender Bassman, Wampler Black '65 Overdrive, Boss PH-3 Phase Shifter, and Boss CH-1 Super Chorus. Drawer 2 has an Eventide PitchFactor and five Boss pedals: a BD-2 Blues Driver, TR-2 Tremolo, DD-7 Digital Delay, RV-5 Digital Reverb, and a BF-2 Flanger. Drawer 3 has an ISP Decimator, a Creation Audio Labs Mk.4.23 Clean Boost, an Electro-Harmonix B9 Organ Machine, and a Fender amp switch.

JEFF THEAKER
Mojo Gringo

"I play blues and classic rock with my band, Mojo Gringo," says Jeff out of Orange County, California. His signal starts with a Korg Pitchblack tuner into a Dunlop 535Q Cry Baby Multi-Wah, to an MXR II Torino Overdrive set for a slightly dirty boost. This is followed by two more OD pedals for various drive colors: a VFE Blues King, followed by an Xotic Effects AC Plus. Next is a Strymon Lex Rotary. In his Fender Hot Rod Deville 2x12's effects loop is an MXR Carbon Copy delay set to one short repeat, running into a TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb, then back to the amp. Everything resides on a Pedaltrain and is powered by a Voodoo Labs Pedal Power 4x4.



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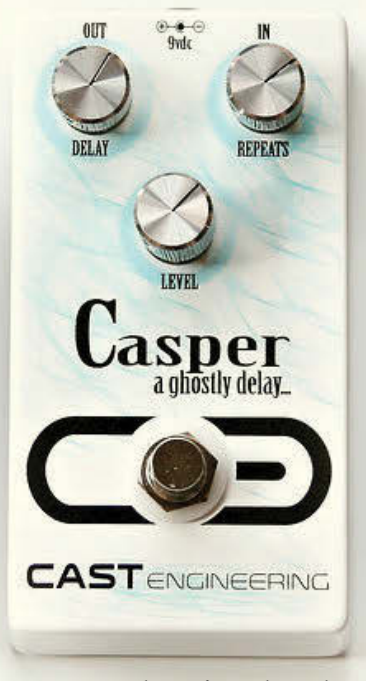
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JOSH DECKER
Netherworld Noise

Josh lets his nuanced, all-encompassing stomp station speak for itself. The artfully decorated and visually interesting pedals on his board include a Boss OC-3 Super Octave, Catalinbread Zero Point, Ernie Ball VP Jr. Volume Pedal, EarthQuaker Devices Bit Commander and Hummingbird V3, Electro-Harmonix Freeze, Mid-Fi Electronics Psych Byke, Moog Minifooger MF Ring, Old Blood Noise Endeavors Dark Star Pad Reverb, Old Blood Procession Reverb, Old Blood Reflector Chorus, Pro Co RAT 1997, Strymon Dig and El Capistan, TC Electronic Ditto X2 Looper and PolyTune 2, Walrus Audio Descent, Walrus Vanguard, Walrus Voyager, Xotic Effects EP Booster and SP Compressor. Everything is mounted on a Blackbird 1530 pedalboard with Lava Cables Tightrope wiring and powered by a Walrus Audio Phoenix and Aetos.



ZE PEPS
Pedals from Portugal

"I was an electric-only player but when I started playing my Taylor 314ce, it blew my mind," says Ze Peps. "I bought it here in Portugal in 2012, and since then it has transformed me as a guitarist. Thanks to that Taylor, I became a professional musician."

He plugs his acoustic Taylor straight into a PA or through this effects pedal rig and into a Roland AC-33. His pedalboard has two MXR Zakk Wylde Overdrives (used simultaneously), and a Boss DD-7 Digital Delay, Boss RV-5 Digital Reverb, Boss tuner, volume pedal, and wah. "The 314ce sounds sweet and I don't even need an anti-feedbacker in the soundhole," he says, "so I end up almost not playing solidbody electric guitar in all of my music projects."

PORTRAITS IN TONE

Richie Kotzen RK5

Not just another version of the Fly Rig 5® simply bearing his name, the Richie Kotzen RK5 Signature Fly Rig was a close, year-long collaborative effort. Meticulous about every facet of his playing, singing, songwriting and tone, Richie's attention to the details of this pedal was nothing less.

What distinguishes the RK5 from the Fly Rig 5 is Richie's Signature OMG overdrive. Tuned specifically to Richie's ear, the OMG section brings in the organic Class A-style distortion, but with a tighter, snappier response. It is designed to articulate every nuance of Richie's dizzying playing style for all modes and moods, from clean to aggressive and from rhythmic chords to infinite sustain when it's solo time.

The RK5 offers the same other essential features as the Fly Rig 5: the all-analog SansAmp™, reverb, delay with tap tempo, and a powerful boost. For fly gigs across the globe, jamming at the local hang, and running off to last minute sessions, just pop your RK5 into your guitar case and head for the door.

photo by greg vorobiov



Actual size: 11.5"l x 2.5"w x 1.25"h • Weight: 18.6 oz.

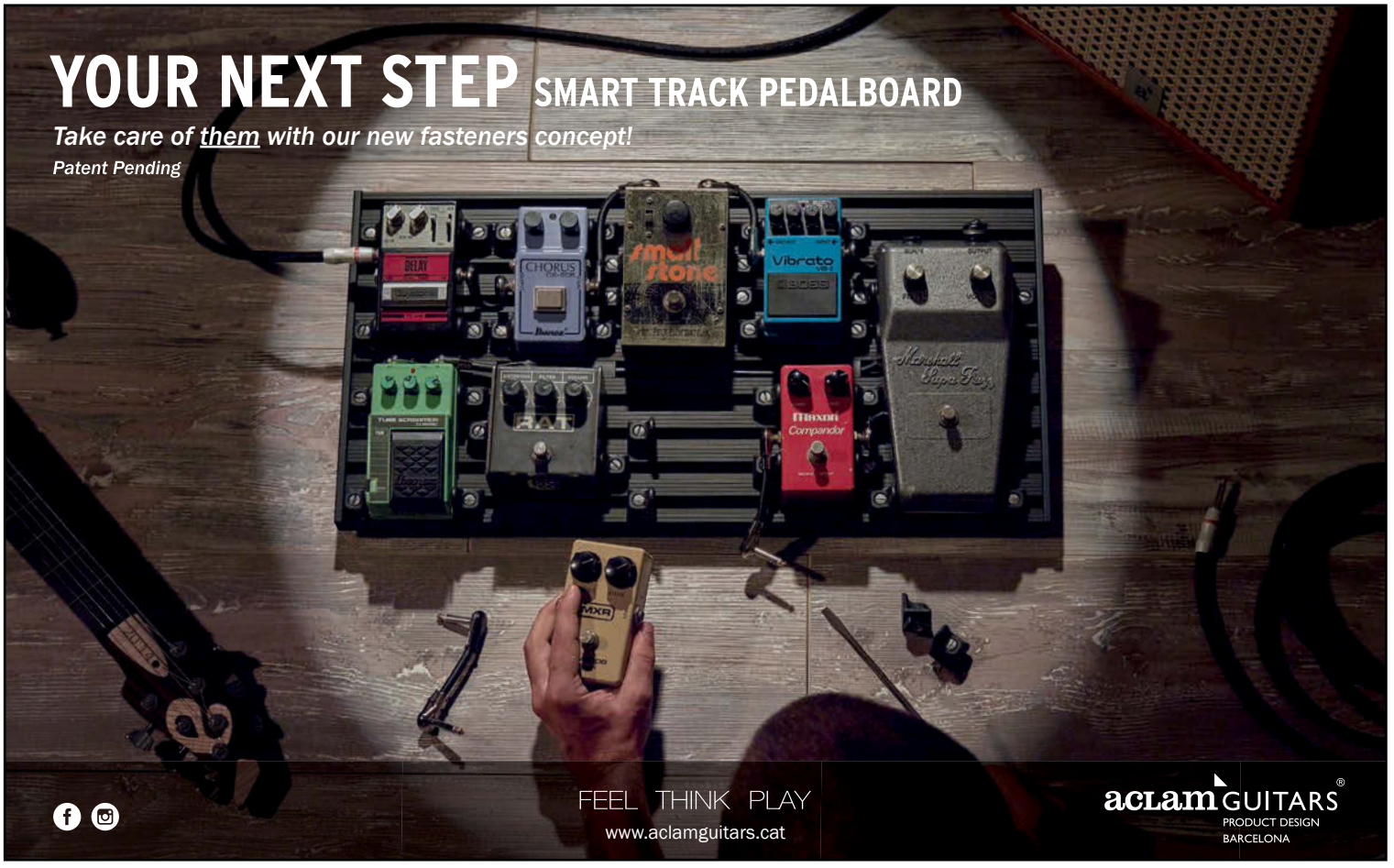


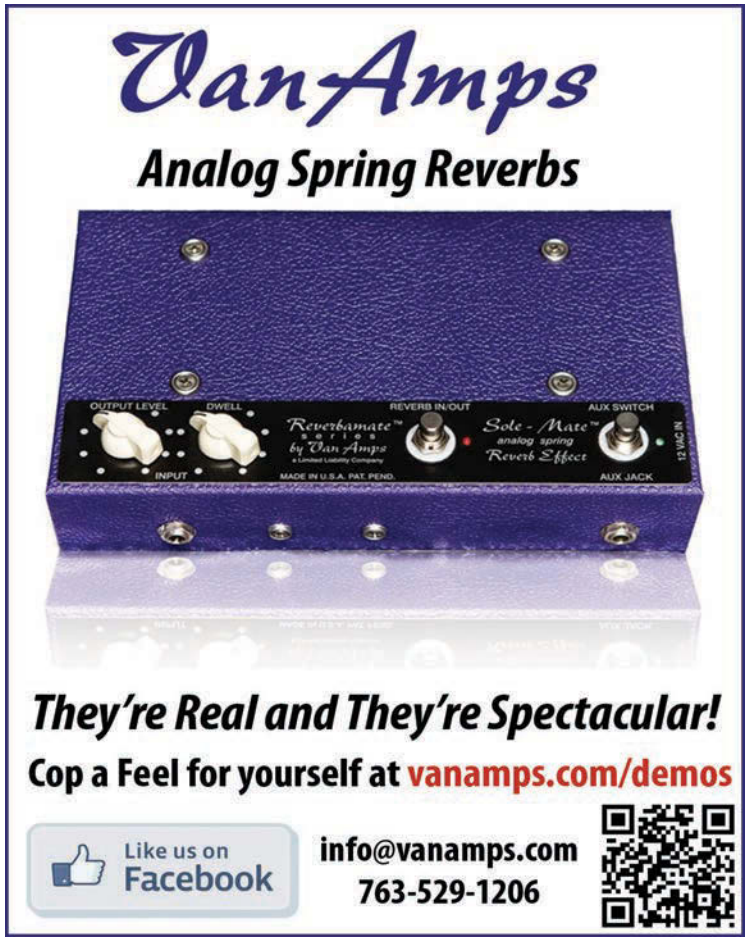
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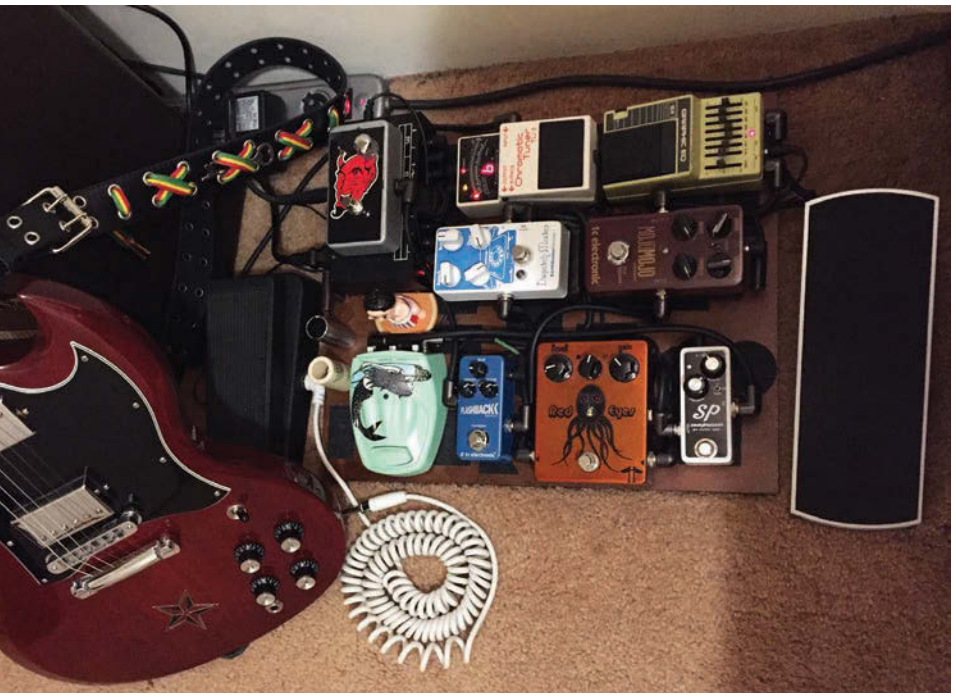
"I'm very obsessive when it comes to projects, especially gear-related projects," says Ryan, a guitarist who has a full-time gig at a large church. "Christmas Eve services are a pretty big deal here, filled with tons of extra work setting up lighting, sound, and new musical arrangements," he shares. "I learned very quickly it was a poor idea to do this overhaul five days before the first of our five services. There were many mornings where I was up until 2 a.m. soldering, being very thankful for my stupid obsessive behavior that landed me in the office in the middle of the night." He's happy to report everything worked great. "The tone was fantastic, and the ability to switch all of my wet and dry effects off and on with the push of a single button was incredible."

The board itself is a Pedaltrain PT-Pro that Ryan stripped and refinished in white, and then sprayed with a truck bed liner to avoid scratches. "I made a few custom power cables, allowing me to have all my power and signal coming to the same corner of the board, cleaning up the potential mess."

Ryan uses a T1M patch bay to connect the leads from his amps and guitars to his board. He runs a TC Electronic Ditto Looper before any other pedal, with the primary function of setting amps, mic positions, and pedals without actually having to play. "It gives me the ability to quickly get everything set before a gig."

His pedal list is long and includes four (yes, four) overdrives: a J. Rockett Archer Overdrive, JHS Moonshine Overdrive, Paul Cochrane Timmy Overdrive, and a JHS Charlie Brown Overdrive. The rest of his stomps are an Xotic Effects SP Compressor, Ernie Ball VP Jr. (T1M modded), Wampler Decibel, Boss G-E7 Equalizer (inserted into an effects loop in the patch bay used to audition new pedals), Xotic Effects RC Booster, Electro-Harmonix Micro POG, Empress Effects Tremolo2, and three Strymon boxes: a Timeline, BigSky, and a favorite/tap switch.

All dry pedals run through his Disaster Area Amps DPC-8EZ. It serves as a bypass looper, as well as a programmable switcher, also with the ability to be controlled via MIDI by a Disaster Area Amps DMC-4 (MIDI controller for Strymon pedals, as well as MIDI controller for DPC-8EZ).



SPENCER MURCH
Surf and Smurf

"My pedalboard is all about economy: how to fit my sounds in the least space for the least money," says Spencer from Vancouver, Canada. The homemade board uses hardware store scraps and screws for a total cost of $3.75. The signal chain, while *very* indirect, tries to maximize usable space on the board. It goes: Dunlop Cry Baby GCB95 wah, Boss TU-3 tuner, Danelectro Cool Cat Vibe ("a total mess of a budget pedal that I love unconditionally"), Xotic SP Compressor, Heavy Electronics Red Eyes Overdrive, TC Electronic MojoMojo Overdrive, '80s Ibanez GE10 ("found by my lovely girlfriend in a Hokkaido salvage shop for $40"), Ernie Ball VP Jr., EarthQuaker Devices Dispatch Master ("set to do a kind of always-on snappy reverb"), TC Electronic Flashback Mini Delay, and an Electro-Harmonix (un-)Holy Grail Nano.

Spencer uses a 2006 SG Standard and a Fender Excelsior amp. "The rig's mascot is a sumo wrestler bobblehead who protects the Pedal Power. That's my Surf and Smurf pedalboard!"

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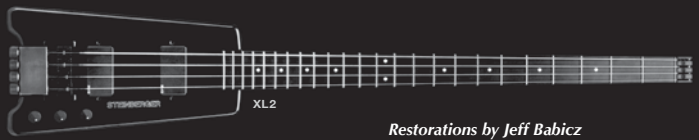
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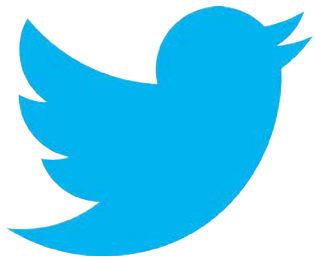
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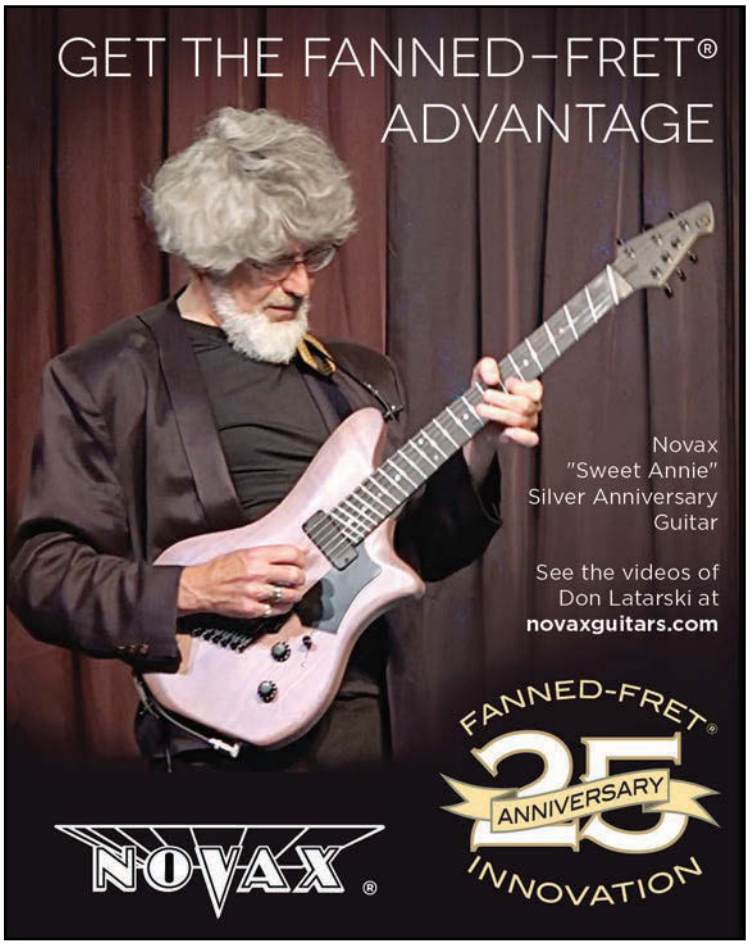


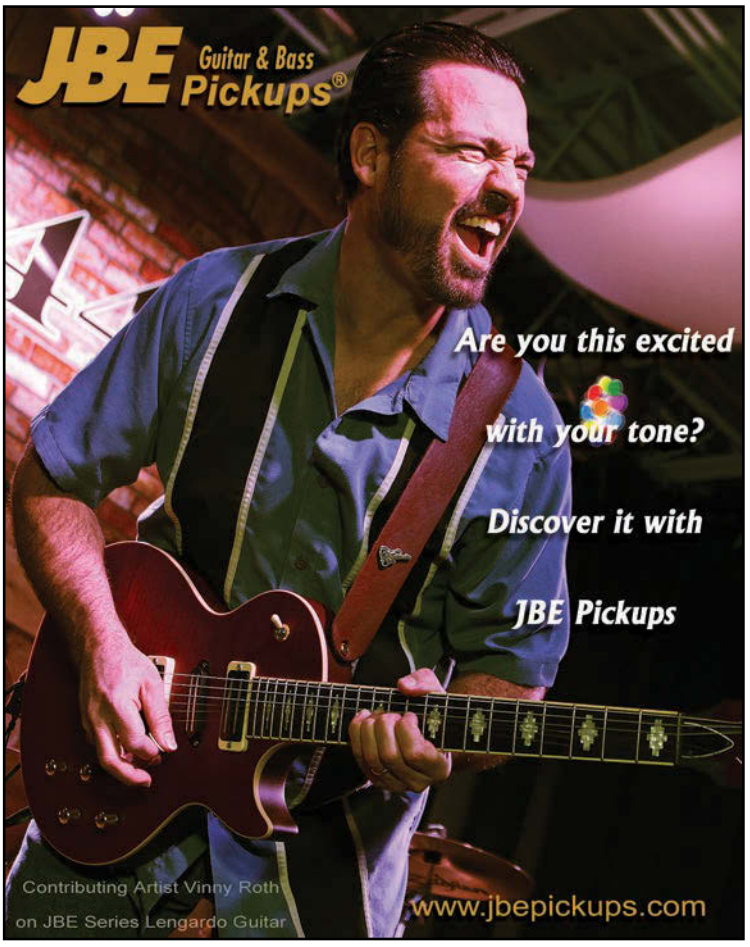
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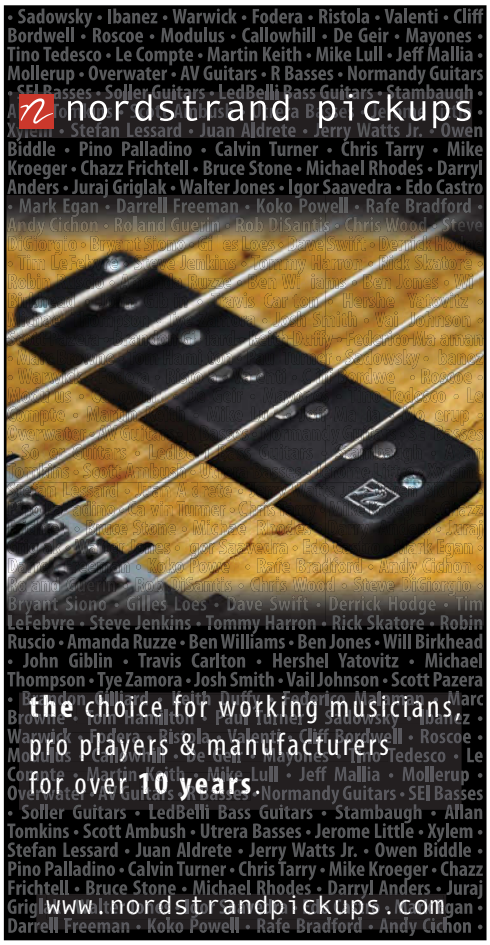
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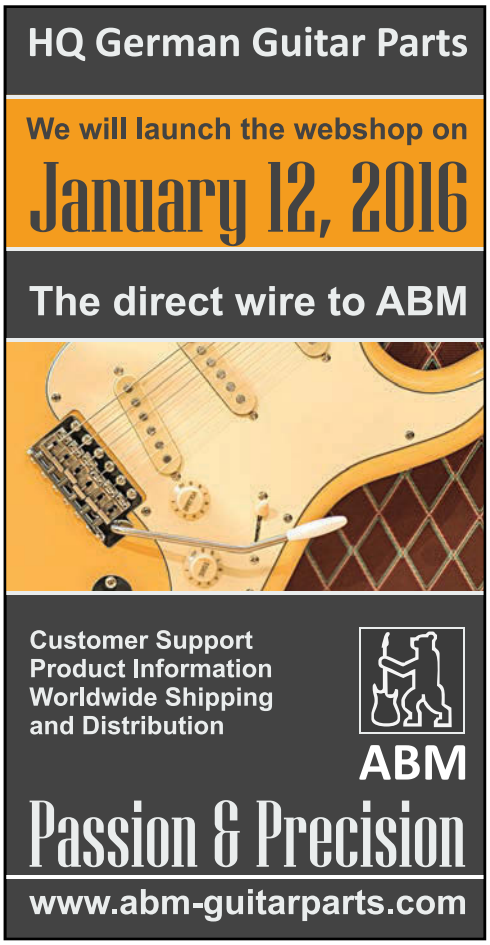
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Domestic Disputes

BY JOL DANTZIG

If appointments on your "U.S.-made guitar" like the bridge, potentiometers, knobs, etc. are sourced overseas, is your guitar really U.S. made?

In my last column, we took a look at what it is for a guitar to be considered handmade. And as often happens, the deeper I dug into the subject, the murkier it became. Some musicians want the "experience" of dealing with an artisan, while others just want a decent guitar at an affordable price. Quite a few people opined that how an instrument is made is not as important to them as *where* it is made, often referencing a "Made in USA" preference. This got me thinking about what, if anything, that means.

Although the woods used in American guitar making are often sourced from around the world, guitar components *were* traditionally fabricated in places like Milwaukee, Chicago, and Kalamazoo. Pickups, bridges, fretwire, and tuning machines were all made completely in the U.S. Names like Grover, Sprague, CTS, DuPont, and Switchcraft were hallowed purveyors of American manufacturing excellence, and their products were used in professional quality instruments because of their quality, reliability, and availability. The raw materials for these parts—such as steel, brass, acrylics, and phenolic—came from Pennsylvania, Indiana, Texas, and dozens of other states. Animal parts such as cow bone and hide-based glues were plentiful right here in America. Paints were formulated from materials harvested in our nation's backyard.

Over the years, however, I've witnessed these same American suppliers steadily transition to offshore manufacturing. Bone nuts come from China, potentiometers and tuners are now made in Korea and Taiwan, while bridges and tailpieces are cast in Japan. I'm not arguing that all of these countries aren't capable of making great products, but when you see "Made in USA," what do you expect?

A lot of the legal wrangling that goes on over this subject is centered on—no big surprise—deceptive advertising. If one assumes that a made-in-America claim is beneficial to sales, it's easy to understand how builders might want to give the impression that their guitars are red, white, and blue—through and through. A few companies might just be proud to be standing on U.S. soil, but if you follow the money, you get swept down a black sinkhole of innuendo and implication.

The Federal Trade Commission is quite familiar with the unfair and deceptive use of "Made in USA" ploys and has issued guidelines to help define the boundaries of advertising language. This document is titled *Complying with the Made in USA Standard,* and it's fascinating reading. There is also a list of companies who have run up against the FTC in this arena (including some in our industry).

To be fair, many builders and distributors are not aware of the origins of their component parts and the implications of falsely representing them. The confusing definition has to do with the percentages of foreign materials and how much of the final product's cost of manufacture is represented by those materials. It's necessary to look as far back as the origin of the raw materials. For instance, the FTC states that if the gold in a gold ring is imported, "an unqualified Made in USA claim for the ring is deceptive." Whoa! Does this relate to the petroleum in my pickguard?

Another of the FTC's examples states: *"A company manufactures food processors in its U.S. plant, making most of the parts, including the housing and blade, from U.S. materials. The motor, which constitutes 50 percent of the food processor's total manufacturing costs, is bought from a U.S. supplier. The food processor manufacturer knows that the motor is assembled in a U.S. factory. Even though most of the parts of the food processor are of U.S. origin, the final assembly is in the U.S., and the motor is assembled in the U.S., the food processor is not considered 'all or virtually all' American-made if the motor itself is made of imported parts that constitute a significant percentage of the appliance's total manufacturing cost. Before claiming the product is Made in USA, this manufacturer should look to its motor supplier for more specific information about the motor's origin."*



With this in mind, a guitar maker who sources pickups, bridges, knobs, potentiometers, switches, paint, tuners, and inlays from outside vendors should be wary of proclaiming that the guitar is domestically made in *any* of their advertising and promotion unless they have audited their sources and calculated the percentages diligently.

I'm afraid that the idea of "American made" is often an illusion. Just like your pickup truck, guitars are far from being strictly domestic today. Of course, another path is for builders to focus on the end result in terms of sound and playability, and leave the flag waving to the politicians. After all, there are wonderful instruments being made in every corner of the globe.



JOL DANTZIG *is a noted designer, builder, and player who co-founded Hamer Guitars, one of the first boutique guitar brands, in 1973. Today, as the director of Dantzig Guitar Design, he continues to help define the art of custom guitar. To learn more, visit guitardesigner.com.*



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Anything can trigger an epiphany. But a drum machine ... who knew?

Will Arts Save Mankind?

BY JOHN BOHLINGER

I was in a very hip bar called the Hospital Club in London a few years ago. I did not belong there. With some research, time, and money, I could have probably faked it, but as it was—fresh from my coach middle-seat flight, mouth-breathing, with a "gee whiz" look on my face combined with the wrong clothes and a do-it-yourself hair-cut—I clearly did not fit in with these fabulous people. I did not engage. I nursed my £10 G&T, watched, and listened. I heard drums in the background and felt I knew the song. After about 40 minutes it hit me: This was not a song. This was one of the beats from the Boss DR-880. No added tracks, no live accompaniment—just press play on the ol' Dr. Rhythm drum machine and let it "boom-kack, bi-doom bi-doom kack" until closing time.

That's when I experienced a double epiphany.

- Epiphany #1: Sometimes the seemingly hip are not hip; they are sheep in an "emperor's new clothes" scenario.
- Epiphany #2: Soon machines will replace many humans in our workforce.

We are maybe five years out from the self-driving car. I've had a few "what seems to be the problem, occifer?" moments so I'm looking forward to eventually retrofitting a Robo-Driver into my 1996 Mercury Grand Marquis. In 2021 I'll be in the backseat playing guitar and smelling of bourbon while the *Blade Runner* girl drives me home. Sounds like a total upgrade when you factor in fewer car crashes nationally and ultra-efficient trucks and busses running safely around the clock, bringing down the costs of business and goods. I imagine a rosy future until I think about the 8.7 million trucking-related jobs that will disappear and how Uber and cabs will be 100 percent self-driving in less than 10 short years. That's a little scary.

Transportation is just a small sector of jobs that will go to automation. Postal worker, assembler, cook, cashier, bookkeeper, teller, loan officer, tax preparer, telemarketer, warehouse, and factory jobs will be gutted, making human labor increasingly rare. This is neither good nor bad. This is evolution. As technology replaces humans, perhaps leaving the majority unemployed, there's going to be a frighteningly wide gap between the have-nots and the have-jets, leaving a whole lot of the population wondering what the hell they should do with themselves.

I'm not worried about a *Terminator*-style future with robots hunting down humans. I see it as a Pixar-ian world like *Wall-E,* with the chubby elite drinking liquid cupcakes, their atrophied legs barely able to carry their doughy frames. Technological advances should be able to provide an era of abundance for all, with unlimited energy, food, and clean water, but eventually there's going to be some serious civil unrest because happiness is more than being fed. (Although it's probably impossible to be happy and starving.)

Google "what makes people happy" and you get 10,000 versions of this answer: There are three main things that make people happy—close relationships, a job or a pastime they love, and helping others.

A government program from 1935 may be able to provide Future World with all these ingredients. During the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented the Federal Art Project, which employed musicians, artists, writers, actors, and directors in visual arts, drama, media, and literacy projects. FAP hired hundreds of artists who created more than 100,000 paintings and murals, and over 18,000 sculptures. The program supported the careers of such renowned artists as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Mark Rothko, Arshile Gorky, Philip Guston, Thomas Hart Benton, and Stuart Davis.

Once we figure out how to feed and house everybody, why not implement a new version of the Federal Art Project? If you are the creative type, you could teach or take music and art lessons, perform publicly, create public works—make *life* a big art project. This may sound like hippie nonsense, but the FAP worked before and could be the difference between a future dystopia or a renaissance. After all, isn't contributing to society, building community, and helping others the trifecta of happiness? A purpose-driven life trumps money when it comes to contentment. Just because the rich get richer and the poor stay poor does not mean the poor majority can't be fulfilled. Maybe even musicians.

The obvious question is how do we pay for this with fewer people paying taxes? I don't know the answer, but apparently the system worked in the past. The Great Depression was worse then we can imagine, with unemployment in some major cities as high as 80 or 90 percent—but one New Deal and WW II later, the U.S. experienced prosperity like we've never seen.

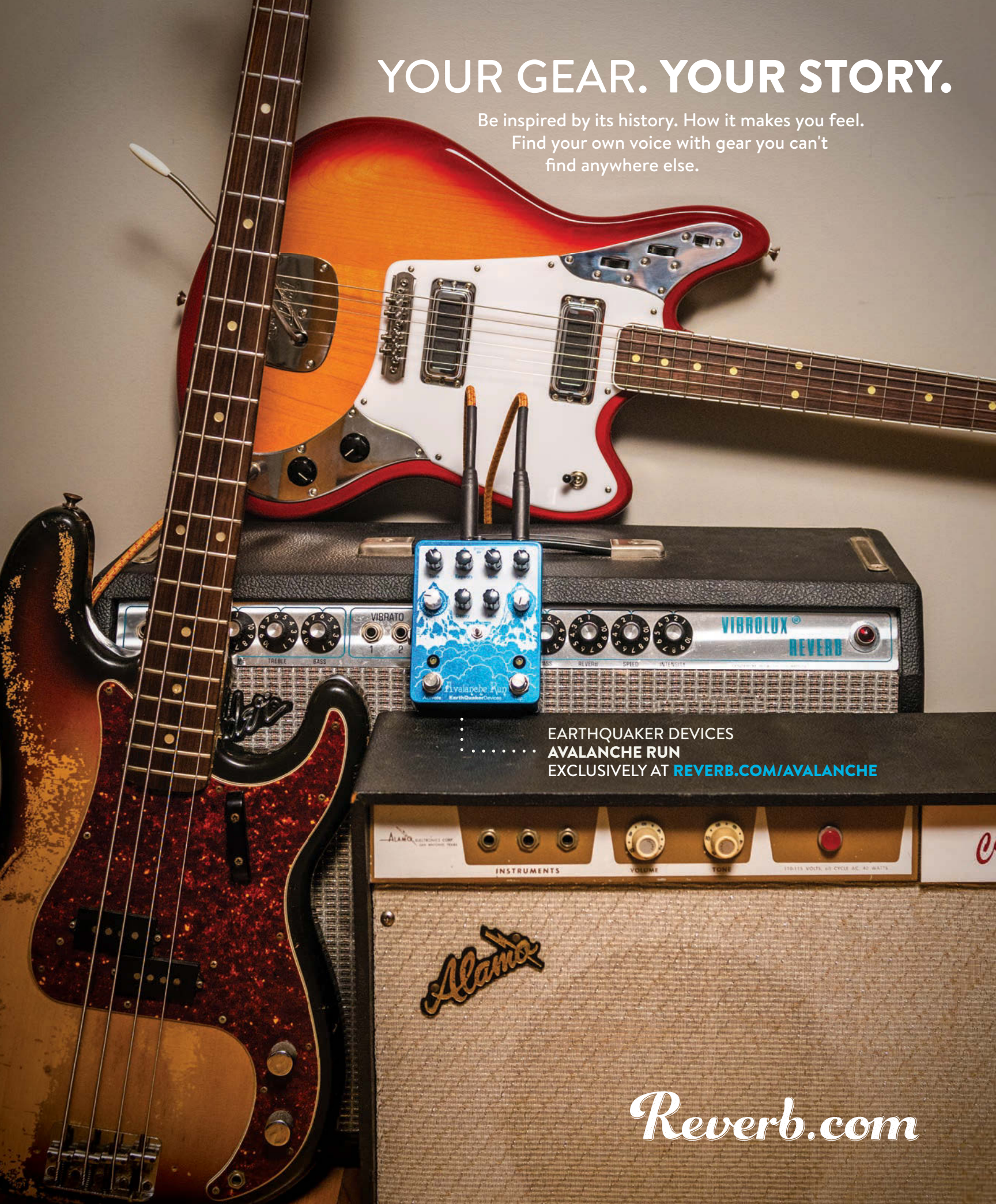
This proposal is a tad premature and I may not be around for the rebellion. I'm putting this out there now so in the future—when or if the unemployed masses go cray cray—the powers that be might consider this FDR blast from the past and embrace art and music to mollify the masses and create a more beautiful world.

There is no science fiction anymore. Anything you can imagine, given infinite space and time, will probably happen. In the not-too distant future, we could find ourselves with the wealthy minority in elite bars listening to drum machines and insipid small talk while the dirty masses roam the streets in angry gangs … or we could create a utopian future with machines doing the grunt work, a skilled working class keeping it running, and a large part of humanity focused on creativity and enlightenment. Hellscape or Utopia? It could go either way.



JOHN BOHLINGER
is a Nashville musician who has led the band on NBC's Nashville Star *and served as musical director of the* CMT Music Awards *for the last six years. In addition to his "Last Call" column, John recently joined* PG *as our full-time gear demo/Rig Rundown video dude.*

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